

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1966</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 2	"God, Unlimited"	John 1:16
January 30	"Fundamental Question"	John 1:38
February 6	"A Man Named Andrew"	John 1:40-42
February 13	"A Man Named Peter"	John 1:40-42
February 27	"Jesus And Judas"	John 18: 2
March 6	"Jesus And Annas"	John 18:12-13
March 13	"Jesus And Peter"	John 18:12-13
March 20	"Jesus And Pilate"	John 19: 4 &16
March 27	"Jesus And Barabbas"	John 18: 40
MISSING April 3	"Jesus And The People"	Luke 18: 31-33
April 10	"But Go - -"	John 20: 17-18
April 17	"A Man Called Thomas"	John 20: 24
April 24	"Good Shepherd"	John 10:11
May 1	"Christian Joy"	John 16: 22
May 8	"To His Own Home"	John 19: 26-30
May 15	"New Way To God's Heart"	John 16: 29-30
May 29	"If A Man Loves"	John 14: 23
June 5	"A Man Named Nicodemus"	John 3: 1
June 12	"The Heart Searcher"	John 2: 23-25

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June 19	"Text Of Texts"	John 3: 16
July 3	"A Nation Under God"	Psalms 67: 1-2
August 14	"Who Listens To Prophets?"	Luke 19: 41-42
August 21	"Saints, Beware!"	
August 28	"Where Faith Bogs Down"	Mark 7: 32
September 4	"God's Fellow Workmen"	I Cor. 3: 9
September 11	"Disciples"	Matthew 10: 1
September 18	"Witnesses"	Acts 1: 8
September 25	"Saints"	I Cor. 1: 2
October 2	"Come Wind Or Weather"	Ephesians 4: 1
October 9	"Fools"	I Cor. 4: 10
October 16	"Friends"	John 15: 15
October 30	"Christians"	Acts 11: 26
November 6	"Believers"	Acts 5: 14
November 20	"God's Chosen"	Col. 3: 12
November 24	"The Last Test Of A Saint"	Psalms 145: 16
November 27	Someone's Coming: Who?"	Luke 3: 4
December 4	"Someone's Coming: When?"	Luke 21: 28
December 11	"Someone's Coming : So What?"	Matthew 11: 5
December 11	"Unmistakably God"	Isaiah 11: 2
December 18	"Someone's Coming: Where?"	John 1:26

1966- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

MISSING December 24

"Who's Afraid?"

December 25

Someone's Coming: Why?"

John 18: 37

"GOD, UNLIMITED"

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The sermon is another in the series for the year based upon passages from the Gospel according to John. Today's sermon is also based upon the Gospel for the day. It bears the title, "God, Unlimited" and the text, the 16th verse of the 1st chapter:

"And of his fulness have all we received,
grace upon grace."

In the South Mountains of Pennsylvania's Adams County is a treasured spot which some of us fondly remember from the days of our youth. It's known as Camp Nawakwa, the first Lutheran Leadership Training Camp for young people established by the United Lutheran Church in America. Dr. Michael Hadland Fisher, whom some of us continued to hold in sacred memory long after his earthly pilgrimage was completed, was the man who was the prime mover in selecting the spot.

Teenagers went there, ordinarily two weeks at a time, and then when the experience of the camping was over, an experience that some of us labeled "as near like Heaven as anything could possibly be here on earth," we broke camp with a particular ceremony that took place at the Cairn.

Now the Cairn was a mound of rocks where each camping season and each camping group came and held a parting ceremony. It was done in a good Biblical tradition. One day one of us asked, "Why do we do this?" and then we were reminded that that was also written into the ceremony, for a passage of Scripture included went something like this: "What do these stones mean?"

The answer that we got to our question was:

..well, this is to link together all who have ever been exposed to Nawakwa. With the placing of the rock by this camp we associate ourselves with all who have ever been here before, and we establish a link now with all those who are yet to come!

It was a fine and worthy tradition.

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I continue to be haunted by the question, what does this mean? Now this I submit to you this morning, is a salutary thing, that a man passing through any kind of experience ought to ask himself ever so often the question: what does this mean? Take a man who has been married perhaps for a decade, fifteen, twenty years. It could be a very valuable thing if sometime he sat down very quietly, by himself, and then gave to reflecting, "What does it mean, this marriage of mine? - what does she mean to me? - - what by the grace of God should I mean to her?" Then, if one should be fortunate enough to have children, "What does this relationship mean, this relationship that I have to her, and to them? - - what is it that God allows, yea, verily, what is it that God appoints in this relationship and in this experience?"

This could be a very salutary thing for any man to do with practically any relationship into which he enters. And at year's end we usually reflect upon the passing of time. Is time God's most precious gift to us? Is time the only thing that any man really has? In our liturgy we spell it out every Sunday, in the Declaration of Grace, "The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time

for amendment of life - - ".....as though we didn't understand what time actually is, the Church labels it for us, the Church defines it for us. What is the meaning of time?

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So I come to this sacred desk on the Second Sunday after Christmas, not only because it's inherent in the Gospel lesson for the day, but I look upon this as another opportunity to take another good long look at Christmas. It's come - - it's gone. You observed it. You had your celebration. What did it mean? What is the meaning of God come to us in Jesus Christ?

...maybe you were fortunate enough to be seated here in the Nave on Christmas Eve at any one of the four services when we marked the Holy Nativity, and then you went away. And you might have remembered about the loveliness of the candlelight, the poinsettia-banked altar, the sensitivity by which impressionable teenagers identified themselves with those who were part of the first Christmas story....maybe you remember how you felt when we sang with the choir the hymns of the Faith....and you went away, you remembered the Christmas Eve....and you talked about the way it happened, and what was there...

But I'm constrained to ask you, did you raise the question: what did it mean? - - why should a people keep marking the Festival of the Holy Nativity? - - what does it mean?

You remember when I told you several Sundays ago, that last Sunday in Advent, in fact, when the sermon bore the title, "God Came - In Person" and the text was John, the writer of the fourth Gospel, in a one-sentence recital

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of the Nativity, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and full of truth." And you remember how I told you there was a time, over a period of a number of years, when I was disappointed that John dealt with the Christmas story in this way, because you see, the writer of the fourth Gospel gives us nothing of the atmosphere of Christmas, he deals with no incidental details. John doesn't set a star in the sky, John doesn't say, "Listen, you can hear angels sing!" John doesn't say, "Look for wise men trekking over the distant road for several years." John doesn't say, "Behold there were shepherds in the field who left their flocks and went to Bethlehem town."...

....John doesn't say there was a woman named Mary, who heavy with child, could go no step farther, and was delivered in a stable.....

...necessary, impressionable as all the setting of the Christmas story may be, John sets it all aside, and John remembers that first Christmas and he makes no mention of these things. He simply deals with the meaning of it all.

He doesn't tell us what happened. He tells why it happened...

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us - - "

...and then there was a result:

" - - we beheld his glory - - "

...and he no sooner said that than he passes on ever so quickly to the text for today's sermon:

" - - and of his fulness have we all received,
grace upon grace."

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This is no small thing that John has done for us. He's telling us above all else that God identifies Himself with this world, that God comes in person to traffic among us. Now, it's a sad thing that there are some of us who don't fully appreciate that. There are many, many people in this world who honestly believe that God can't possibly afford to do this, that if He is to be God, He has to be a God who is out of this world, a God who can't be stained and soiled by us. Maeterlinck does us a disservice when he says, "Imagine God seated upon a sunny mountain, having no concern for what's down deep underneath the fog, where a wicked world is rampant with hatred, envy and strife." It isn't that Maeterlinck would tell us that God is removed from the world; it's also that Maeterlinck would imply that God, remotely removed, is also unmoved by what's happening down here.

The basic Christian concept of God is this: that God is concerned, that God will identify, that God does come to us....and the miracle of miracles, He comes Himself and takes on human flesh, for the simple reason that a God out of this world can't be of much help to you who are in the world.

It takes a big God to become little enough to take on human flesh, and when there are those who rule out this possibility for God, they're simply belittling the power of God to be great enough to become little.

Now John, the writer of the fourth Gospel, reflected upon the Christmas story, and he says, this is the meaning of it: God came in human flesh -- God became visible. Now it's true that no man has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. And John says -- "Can't you see Him standing there -- think of it! -- we saw Him! -- -- we beheld his glory, glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth."

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Now then, there are some things that we more readily believe. Particularly is this true when we are listening to those who by experience are qualified to speak. So the testimony of the writer of the fourth Gospel is before us. In the crucible of his own life he had turned repeatedly to Jesus Christ, and in every instance, what he needed most was supplied. There is for him absolutely no end to goodness which God is able to give. John reverently remembering Jesus Christ...

...he would have been numbered among those who denied Jesus,

he would have been numbered among those who forsook Him.....
...remembers how he turned again to Jesus Christ, and everything that he needed God supplied in Christ. That's what John is telling us, "And the Word became flesh - - - full of grace and truth - - and from that fullness all of us have received grace upon grace."

John is saying, "This God who came to us in Jesus Christ is Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father - " All that God is, Jesus Christ is - - - fully, completely, perfectly - - He is God, Unlimited. That's why we Lutherans cherish this verse of Scripture. That's why we Lutherans insist that if we are to link heart and hand with any other Christian in a cooperative endeavor, to form any kind of a council or federation, it must be written into the credo, it must be written into the basic statement of that group that Jesus Christ is Divine Lord and Saviour. We do not refer to Him simply as Master...we do not refer to Him simply as Lord...we do not simply refer to Him as a Saviour - - but always Divine.

That's another reason why we Lutherans cling tenaciously to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, for in the Trinity, you see, it's spelled out that Jesus

Christ is God. For to see Jesus Christ as anything less than God is to see Him for less than He is. And the authority of a disciple who leaned on the breast of Jesus Christ, the authority of one, perhaps, more than any other single person who ever lived was spiritually kin to Jesus Christ:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and
we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth

- - and of that fulness all of us have received,
grace upon grace."

...He is God, Unlimited.

You may not like what I am about to tell you now, but I sometimes think that being a Christian all of your life has a certain kind of disadvantage. Now this is not to mean that I would wish it otherwise for you, but there are some things we never fully appreciate just because we've always had them. And you know very well that my appreciation for the Gospel, which was no stranger to my heart when I first came to you, that my appreciation for the Gospel has been enhanced and deepened after that sojourn in India two years ago. You just can't spend six weeks with a people where perhaps only two or three out of one hundred know what it is to have Jesus Christ as Saviour.. ...you just can't spend time in a land where you directly confront people who do not know that in Jesus Christ there is God, Unlimited.

Or do you want me to put it for you this way: suppose sometime you gathered enough courage to go across the street and sit down and have a conversation in depth with your Jewish neighbor, and then in your dialog (a rather hazardous thing perhaps for you to do) - - in your dialog to discover if there's really any basic difference between him and you, in this knowledge of God, unlimited. John is saying, "We found this to be true in Jesus Christ:

He is God, Unlimited."

All that God is, Jesus is, and from His fulness we have been
able to draw it, grace upon grace

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January 30, 1966

"FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION"

The sermon today which is entitled "Fundamental Question" is another in the series based upon passages from the Fourth Gospel.

The text, it's the 36th verse of the 1st chapter of John:

"Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where do you dwell?"

One of the basic principles to which we try to adhere as a staff here at Saint Luke Church is the fact that each staff member has a concern for the total picture, that no matter what your particular sphere may be, you have an interest in what's going on in the life of a person, even though he may not be involved in your program.

This is the reason why Sister Josephine spoke as she did, as I recall that staff meeting several years ago. Very properly, and with true sensitivity, we were talking about one of our teenagers, and the relationships that that teenager had with other people. And Sister Josephine, with so many precious insights that characterize her, simply said, "But you have to remember that some people turn to certain people for certain needs." She spoke wisely and she spoke well, because this seems to be a fact of life, not always understood. Because you and I raise the question sometime when we see certain people going together -- "What in the world do you suppose she ever sees in him?"...or we scratch our heads and "I can't quite figure that relationship out." -- it's a

helpful thing to remember Sister Josephine's observation, that certain people may meet certain needs in the lives of certain people.

Now all of this is prefatory, prefatory to the fact that in the life of John the Baptist he had come to a crucial moment, when he was discovering that certain people following him were no longer going to follow him, that they were going to turn to somebody else. Maybe I'd better fill you in on the details of this particular Scriptural passage.

John had gone preaching. John had been saying, Somebody's coming, the Promised One is going to be here one day. And when He comes, you must all follow Him. I must decrease, but He must increase. Then one day John saw Jesus and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God." When he said that, some of his disciples who had been with him turned away from him and went after Jesus.

Now this is the test of a great man, because a master is always known by his ability to attract followers. This isn't at all unusual for you because you can remember when you first began to read your Bible -- sooner or later you came to talking about Jesus and His disciples, because the Master attracted people. He had those who went after Him and followed Him. John had succeeded in doing this very, very well. And John was recognized, and no matter where he went he got a hearing. Everybody talked about John the Baptist. They had never seen anybody quite like him. He really was "somebody else." He attracted a great deal of attention, he had the limelight, he was the only one on the stage. But he did say that he was talking about somebody who was yet to come, and when Jesus did come, you were to follow Him.

That day had arrived. Would John meet the test or wouldn't he meet the test? Well we know that John did meet the test. And he was perfectly willing, then, to allow his followers to go after Jesus.

But when we read the life of Jesus in the New Testament, we learn very quickly that Jesus was always probing the hearts of men and putting their minds to the test. He knows the frailty of human nature, and when He saw them turning away from John and coming to Him, He put to them this very fundamental question, "What are you seeking?" It isn't too much to say that Jesus was implying, "Why will you turn away from John the Baptist and come after me? -- what do I have that John doesn't have? I I what do you think that I can give you that you have not already received from John the Baptist?" Jesus, knowing the frailty of human nature, is always asking fundamental questions....

...why do you come after Me?

....what are you looking for?

...you may apply that question to your own life --

....what do you want from life?

.....what do you want from any relationship -- what do you want from any experience?

Now let me go back for a minute to what we said earlier -- that there are certain people who meet a certain need in our lives as other people cannot meet it. Now this is never to exploit a human relationship, as though you turn only to certain people at certain times and ignore them at other times. It's simply to recognize a very precious thing. In my first parish there was a preacher's daughter who one day

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told me, in all sincerity, that as long as her father lived she had no great religious problem, no great religious difficulty. It was easy for her to believe in God. She even used this figure of speech - "it was easy for her to be good." Then he died. Off she went to college. The pendulum began to swing in the other direction. Then one day she met a particular person, who brought her life back into proper balance. God had raised up that person for a purpose, to meet a need in her life that had to be met at that particular time.

You and I ought to apply this truth to ourselves. God made us as social creatures - - you and I grow and develop according to the influence that other people have upon us. Each one of us is the sum total, in a certain sense, of all the influences that have been at work upon our lives through our association with other people.

Now this is the crucial test: could it be that God has seen fit to meet a need in someone's life through you? (granted the need exists).... but suppose you were to fail to meet the need in your friend's life, when you were the only person within reach? There's no question about it, John had met a need in these people's lives. He had called them to repentance, he had driven them to their knees, he had, if you may allow me to use the figure of speech, he had put the fear of God into their hearts..... ...you can read certain passages of the New Testament for yourself that tell how he came preaching, as though the very earth were to shake with the thunder in his voice, a kind of hellfire-and-damnation preacher - - he took life that seriously, and this was the need that had to be met.

And now the Lamb of God appears. Will people realize that Jesus meets

a need in their lives that only Jesus can meet? That's why Jesus puts to them the fundamental question:

....what are you looking for?

.....why will you come after me?

(this sermon transcribed as recorded - tape incomplete)

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"A MAN NAMED ANDREW"

Today's sermon, another based on passages in the Fourth Gospel, bears the title, "A Man Named Andrew"; and the text, the 40th to the 42nd verses of the first chapter of John:

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

It doesn't seem possible, does it, that we're still dealing in passages back there in the first chapter according to John? The sermons being preached for the most part this year in Saint Luke Church from this pulpit will deal with selected passages from John's Gospel between now and next June, even as we began last September. September....October.... November....December....January -- they've come and gone, and we still haven't gotten much beyond the first chapter of John's Gospel. But that's the way the Bible ought to be read, slowly, deliberately, giving full and earnest heed to each passage, reading not only what's in front of you, but with whatever sanctified imagination God may bestow upon you, to try and read between the lines, to picture how it was that this thing happened, why it was this was said the way it was said. And then, of course, that most significant of all things, how one can relate this precious truth to his own life. So we turn again and again to this Fourth Gospel.

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Now as John reverently remembers for us, he's telling us how at the very beginning Jesus never intended to guide and direct the Kingdom here on earth single-handed. Granted the Kingdom is His, right at the start He looked around for certain people, recruits, gathered them together as a little company. We call them His disciples. Eventually there were twelve in number. Today's sermon deals with one of the very first. His name was Andrew.

How much do you know about him? Well, not very much. He wrote no book, we have no record that he ever preached a sermon, he was never an instrument in the hands of God by which a miracle occurred. He's really a little-known disciple. But of the disciple band there is variety, and it's always a helpful thing to remember this: that while they serve as the company of disciples, they were not all of the same stripe. As two members of one family can be as different as day is from night, so you find so great a variety in the disciple band.

Some of them, of course, were a bit more spiritually sensitive than others. That accounts for the fact that on certain occasions Jesus would take with Him, not all twelve disciples, not even half of them....but He'd look around -- ah, yes, there was Peter -- He'd nod at Peter....then there was James -- He'd give him a favorable, understandable glance....and then He'd look at John.....and before you would know it, the four of them would be going off by themselves. And of these three, there was one by the name of John, who often is referred to as the Beloved Disciple.

Not that our Lord shows favoritism. The love of Jesus Christ remains constant, it's full and free for each one of us, but some of us have a

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way of responding in a way that others do not respond. Others, perhaps, and the word for it is this, are a bit more spiritually sensitive, and so there can be the natural drawing-apart. It can be as understandable as that.

Well now, let's take a good look at one of these disciples. He never was part of the inner circle. His name was Andrew.

The first thing that I can tell you about him is this: he had a famous brother, and his brother's name was on the lips of everybody.... ..so much so, that whenever they talked about Andrew, it was always "Andrew -- Simon Peter's brother." That meant he was overshadowed, overshadowed from the very beginning! The very day that he introduced Simon Peter to Jesus, Jesus said something to Simon Peter that He never said to Andrew. He promised a tremendous change in a man's personality. He said, this is what you have been -- this is what you're going to become: solid as a rock. That's a grand and a good thing to say to a person, to be as firm and to be as stable as that! -- and to have the promise one day fulfilled.

And here stands poor Andrew. He went and discovered Simon Peter and brought him to Jesus....and no such thing ever said to Andrew. From the very moment that he introduced his brother to Jesus Christ, Andrew was overshadowed. No matter where he went, he was invariably referred to as Simon Peter's brother. And so he was! But it never drove him to one appointment after another on a psychiatrist's couch. That's the first lesson that you and I can well afford to learn from Andrew -- overshadowed -- a lesser light -- but content to become the lesser light.

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This is more genuine than you may first admit. How many people do we know who resent the fact sometime that they are always being associated by their father's name, no matter how worthy the father's name may be! -- but any lad wants to stand on his own!....how many people do we know who resent being remembered, who are always associated by their sister, their brother -- no matter how worthy the association, yet each one of them wants to be known for exactly what he is. Maybe the first mark of maturity is to accept the fact that I am what I am in my own right, by the grace of God I can become something more wonderful, but in the meantime, I happen to be what I am.....

....bless his soul, so well did he allow Christ to govern his life that he knew that they also serve who are the lesser lights.

Therefore by faithfulness to his role he became the great introducer. That's the second thing to be said about Andrew.....overshadowed --"all right then, I'll be what I was meant to be.....if I can't get the lime-light, I shan't worry about it. If on occasion Jesus may look to Peter and say, Peter, come with me, and never so much as invite me, Andrew, I shall not go off in a corner and sulk....I shall not say to Him, I will no longer be your disciple. If I am to be the introducer, then let me be the introducer."

He's a giant, you see, who can be as little as that! God needs men big enough to be little. Andrew becomes the patron saint, if you please, of all who are willing to become, to assume the secondary role, to step aside when the light is on others. He never went to the Mount of Transfiguration....he never went to the Garden of Gethsemane....he has no

memory of standing there alone, as John did, in the shadow of the Cross... he can never hold in his heart the precious memory of Jesus saying something to him as precious as He said to Peter or to John. He was contentto be a lesser light.

A wise man has said a word that each of us must remember, that there is absolutely no end to the good that could let loose in this world, if people just wouldn't worry as to who was going to get the credit....if their names would not appear in print....if their names would not be on the lips of others.

Within the past week I have done the very natural thing that you can understand. On occasion I have looked back over these past ten years when I have been privileged to walk with you as your Pastor. And one of the bright chapters in these exceedingly good years, the most rewarding, spiritually, that I have ever known, is to look back and to see certain chapters being written in our history, and among them, things being done for us by someone in particular whose name you will never know. One chapter in particular -- the day I stood in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart with the person who made it possible for us, and the person said, "This I have done because I am grateful. God knows who I am, and that's all that matters."

Andrew could walk away and live with himself, knowing that he was a lesser light, and yet he had introduced someone to Jesus Christ, and that's all that matters. He had won his brother! -- Simon Peter had come. That was enough. Well this is the second thing about Andrew, Simon Peter's brother: he was the introducer. Think of it! -- that most remarkable of all

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the disciples (I think you can put it that way) -- Simon Peter introduced by little-known Andrew. Behind any great outstanding personality is the lesser light....the secretary, the assistants and the lieutenants to great and good men....the wife content to be the wife, while he gets the credit.....Boswell to his Johnson....Melancthon to his Luther.....
.....they also serve --

But going back again to Andrew, the introducer. He introduced Simon Peter. He introduced a boy to Jesus one day, did you know that? -- the boy that was part and parcel for the performance of a miracle. Here were the five thousand, this was a crisis, Jesus and the disciples had a problem on their hands. Well how to meet it? It was Andrew, mind you, the lesser light, who scans the group hurriedly and then his eye falls upon this boy with a child's lunch, and he said, "Sonny, come along, I want you to meet Jesus.".....and then Jesus took the little that the boy had and out of it became a lot. It was Andrew, don't you ever forget that! -- who introduced the boy to Jesus.

And then one day, there were those Greeks who came, driven by curiosity, the intellectuals. They, too, had heard about Jesus. Who was it that introduced them to Jesus? It was Andrew! -- "Sir, we would see Jesus" "All right, come along. I'll introduce you."

A poet puts it this way, not much for poetry, I'll grant you, but it makes its point:

"Quick eye had Andrew. He it
was amid
the thronging multitudes, that
marked the lad;
And what his basket and how much
it had,

Two fishes small and loaves of barley five,
Rewarded eye, to trivial things alive;
In that poor basket, what rich mercy hid!

A brother's heart had Andrew, Joy beyond
All joy to him, the promised Christ to find,
But heavenly joy may not to duty blind.
He cannot rest, his bliss is incomplete,
Till Simon sits with him at Jesus' feet,
His brother then, by more than natural bond."

This world is far better off because of those who discover that they cannot be more than a lesser light, and are content to be it, and perform their lot in life faithfully. To this very day there are some of us who take ever so thankfully to the Throne of Grace in prayer the names of those who introduced us to Jesus Christ.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED PETER"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "A Man Named Peter;" and the text, the 40th to the 42nd verses of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"One of the two which heard John speak,
and followed him, was Andrew, Simon
Peter's brother.
He first findeth his own brother Simon,
and saith unto him, We have found the
Messias, which is, being interpreted,
the Christ.
And he brought him to Jesus. And when
Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art
Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be
called Cephas, which is by interpretation,
A stone."

Significantly enough, the text for today's sermon when we talk about the second of these two disciples commanding our attention, is exactly the same text that we used last Sunday, when we talked about this man's brother, who was also a disciple. Last Sunday we talked about Andrew; today it's Simon Peter.

But I tell you, it naturally follows, for there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. It's the nature and the character of the Gospel that it must be shared. Whenever any man comes to Christ, stick around long enough and eventually you'll see somebody else. No man can keep Christ to himself. This is why we go on remembering Andrew, the patron saint, if you please, of all those who tell other people about Jesus; and they in turn, then, pass the word along to others.

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Now it's this man, Simon Peter. We recognize at once, he's your favorite - - he's my favorite. It's understandable. Reason number one: he's the most spoken-of disciple of all the disciples. No one gets more coverage in the New Testament, no one gets more consideration, than does Simon Peter. His name keeps bobbing upon the horizon, in this situation, or in that situation, saying this, or doing that. Naturally because you know most about him, you're inclined to think most often of him.

The other reason is this: when we talk about him in the pages of the New Testament, he's pictured for exactly the kind of man that he was, a man with a tilted halo, a man with feet of clay. This warms your heart, you see, and oddly enough becomes a kind of encouragement to us, because we believe that if Jesus could use a Simon Peter, who would falter and stumble and even deny, then, you see, there is hope for you and for me. If this is the kind of stuff out of which disciples are made, then there is this ray of hope for my feeble soul as well.

You're no exception then, my friend, for most of us claim him as favorite disciple. Like as not it's because in our better moments we want his experience with Christ to be duplicated in us. What delight we'd most certainly know if it could have been that someone such as Andrew would have introduced us to Jesus Christ! And then the thrill of being in His presence, having Him spiritually X-ray us, and as He would look into the very depth of our soul, seeing more of the angelic than the apish in our make-up. And then above all else, to be able to stay long enough in the company of the Master, so that the net result would be that we become born-again, and get a brand new name to indicate it!

Now as John reverently remembers how Simon Peter came to Jesus, he records what he recalls as his conversation. Jesus looked at Simon Peter and He said,

"Simon, you're son of Jona. From now on you're
going to be called Cephas, which being interpreted
is a stone or a rock."

Now whether it happened exactly that way or not, I cannot tell you. Surely there must have been the exchange of other words, there must have been more of the conversation than what appears here. But what John, as he reverently remembers, is doing is establishing for us in fact and in principle the kind of thing that happened in this encounter between Jesus and Simon Peteras John remembers, Jesus looked him straight in the eye, and the net result was:

"Follow me, Simon Peter, and you'll become a different
man.....Follow me, Simon Peter, and through your
relationship with me -- now known as son of a dove --
you can be called Peter, a rock."

You have a right to recognize this play on names. It's not an unusual thing in the Bible. In the Old Testament, every now and then a man got a new name because of his new relationship with God. People who live in the Near East always made much of a name. You remember how it was with our Blessed Lord -- it was announced, this is what His name is going to be -- "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The name, generally speaking, indicated the basic characteristics and traits of a man, either what he could become or what he actually was.

This is but another evidence of it. A dove? - - a fragile bird.....

"Simon, people no longer will refer to you as
the son of a dove. Stay with me long enough and
they'll call you a rock.....you can become as
stable as all that!"

Now what does this man Simon Peter have to tell us? Well let me
remind you immediately that he didn't become solid as a rock overnight.
This does not mean that I for a moment would discourage you from believ-
ing in the miraculous. But even when God deals with us He has to deal
with all the limitations that we bring to Him, with all the limitations
of our human nature. God has to deal with the stuff that we offer Him.
It takes a bit of doing to make a saint! It takes a bit of doing to
change a man.

But the thing that we must never forget is that God looks into the
possibility, God accents the long view. And this invariably is your
weakness and mine: we are the label-givers, we brand a man by the first
impression, we are prone to mark him off the books....we sit in judgment.
We never take long enough to peer into the depth of a man's heart, to
touch base here and to touch base there, as to what he could become,
granted he had the opportunity to be exposed to the influences that would
fashion him into the stuff of saints. Jesus Christ is willing to take
enough time to look into the depth of a man's heart until He found the
angelic, and then He said, "This is the thing with which I will deal."

You're not forgetting, of course you're not forgetting that example
among examples of conversion, Saul who became Paul, blinded on the road

to Damascus.....do you know it was weeks and months, and even years, until he began to do his effective work for his new Master? It took a bit of doing for God to shape this man from Saul into Paul!

And then too, you must also remember as you deal with Simon Peter, what a professor of ours taught us in college days. We sat at the feet of old George Franklin Dunkelberger. And one day in Psychology he said, "I am going to disillusion some of you men who are studying for the ministry, you pre-theologs, but you'll have to hear me out. There may be reason to believe that in a certain sense human nature doesn't change, that is, the basic elements of human nature. But there is always the possibility of re-directing these energies, re-directing these traits and characteristics, channeling them, harnessing them, into new and nobler avenues." Paul proves the point. He who was a fighter against the Christian faith, once he became converted, did not lose his fighting qualities and characteristics. But now he became a fighter for the Faith, a brilliant defender of the Christian religion. And again I tell you, it takes a bit of doing, you see, to re-direct, to channel anew.

Now when you look at Simon Peter, you have a right to see him exactly as the Bible portrays him. The older I become the more I am convinced that the Bible is the most realistic of all books. It never pretends to present the man as less than he is. He to whom Jesus one day said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" was also the man who denied Jesus Christ. He stumbled, and he faltered. He had certain weaknesses....he was impulsive....he'd speak without thinking....he'd allow

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his emotions to run their course. He was inconstant -- sometimes you knew exactly where he was going to stand, but other times you weren't quite sure. But the story of Simon Peter is not basically the story of a man. The story of Simon Peter is the story of the Master, who with the Master's touch, never lost patience with an impatient disciple. And the upshot of the matter is, that if you want to put it this way, John may have been the disciple whom Jesus loved; Peter was the disciple who loved Jesus -- loved Him because he knew his Master was patient with him. How well he proved the point when after the Resurrection, the first word that Jesus directs to any disciple.... "Go and tell Peter."

As your Pastor, as your spiritual advisor, I beg you to remember Simon Peter, the stuff out of which saints are fashioned. We keep referring to ourselves as a Family in God. As Jesus Christ was patient with Simon Peter, I beg you to be patient with one another. Most of us would like to think that we're in the process of becoming, any one who is at least honest with himself knows that he isn't possibly as good as he could be or as he would like to be. Jesus Christ always dealt with Peter on the basis of his noblest intentions. This is always the sacred task of a pastor -- to deal with his people on the basis of their nobler intentions.

They used to tell the story about Michelangelo. Someone came upon him when as a sculptor he had in front of him this rigid, firm, impersonal block of stone. And then as he began to chisel away, somebody said to him, "What do you intend to do?" Michelangelo simply replied, as though he didn't much care for further conversation, "I intend to ^{release the angel imprisoned} imprison the angel that's within this stone." God, who gave us Jesus Christ, is always about, trying to ^{release} ~~imprison~~ the angel within us.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"JESUS AND JUDAS"

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The sermons these Sunday mornings during Lent, based upon passages of Scripture from John's Gospel, will be a series of character studies dealing with personalities involved in the arrest, the betrayal and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Today's sermon bears the title, "Jesus and Judas;" and the text, it could be the second verse of the 18th chapter of John:

" - - and Judas also, who betrayed him - "

Shall I tell you how this sermon is going to end? - or rather, how it could end - - very properly with these words. The title for the sermon, even though it consists of but three words, deserves careful reading. It should be read this way: "Jesus.....and Judas." For as the drama unfolds the spotlight must always be on Jesus Christ. Judas may be the personification of Evil, but those of us who are God-fearing people have the advantage of discovering how Jesus Christ reacts to evil, and herein is our courage, our inspiration and our example.

Shall we deal now with basic questions. The first question: Judas - the betrayer? Why did he? How could he? Or perhaps this question must be put: Why would Jesus ever have chosen Judas in the first place? He who knows the hearts of men, He who searches their hearts - - could it be that from the very beginning He knew exactly what Judas Iscariot was going to do, and chose him that he might fulfill that purpose?

Be careful, my friend.....don't put Jesus in the same situation as you might put the man who is casting a particular theatrical production, and then among all the people that he could choose he says to this one, "Now you're the

villain. You must be the villain, you must play the part of the villain because I'm assigning you this part." God doesn't act like that. Jesus Christ did not choose Judas in order that he might be the terrible person that he turned out to be. It's risky business to believe that it happened that way. Jesus might have known that that was the way it was going to happen, but it did not follow that Judas had no choice. And there's a world of difference.

In the preparation of this sermon, through the weeks and months, I discovered that there are those who maintain that when Jesus chose the twelve He chose every single one of them in good faith. And what is more, that every single one of them responded to Jesus in good faith. Each of them believed Him to be Lord and Master, each was willing to forsake all that he had and to follow Jesus Christ. Even the Scriptures reveal it this way.

Well then, what went wrong? Why should Judas ever have done what He did? How could a man live in the presence of Jesus Christ for three years, and then betray Him? Is it poor judgment on the part of Jesus? Is it that from the very beginning that Judas is the tool of the devil? I am amazed at the number of answers that are given to the question: Why did Judas betray Him? Any number of Bible students propose this as the reason and that as the reason, and not always common agreement, which leads one to believe that one can't be quite certain what it was that got inside Judas Iscariot. Let me parade in front of you now some of the reasons that are given why Judas became the betrayer that he was.

Number one: There are those who say he betrayed Jesus Christ because he was envious. He wanted to be important. What happened? Jesus Christ ever so often would take with Him Peter, James and John, and off they'd go.....and never

so much as, "This time, Judas, I want you." There are those who tell us that Judas, of all the disciples, came from one particular section of Palestine, the only man who had been chosen from that particular part of the country. And from that day on, they tell us, Judas believed himself to be an outsider - - never completely accepted by the rest of the disciples, never part of the "in" group, not necessarily the three of them, but even the eleven of them. If only he could serve on a committee.....if only he could get the confidence of the Master.....if only, every third day perhaps, it would be Jesus who would say, "Judas, I need your advice and your counsel." And all the while, mark you, this kind of thing was going on, and the recital of the facts of the Scripture record gives it to us....."And Jesus took with him Peter, James and John." It's a matter of established record that it was John who was the beloved disciple, it's a matter of record that at the time of the crucifixion Jesus would single out one disciple, and even before it happened Judas kept nursing the thought...

"It will never be I....it will never be I....it will never be I....

....I'll never have a chance."

There are those who tell us that Judas was the envious one. At least, that's the image he allowed himself to have.

There are those who tell us that Judas Iscariot did what he did because he was avaricious. He held the money bag. He got sick and tired that they had such a meager budget. He wanted so much to see a bigger balance in the books. Then, because he was dealing with money - - of all the disciples, you see, he was the most money-conscious I suppose, and then it's spelled out for us by certain Bible students who say one day he even had a chance to get thirty pieces

of silver. And when people begin to think in terms of money only, one dollar in itself becomes very important, and it's always a sickening thing to see what some people will betray in their better natures when a dollar becomes involved.

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There are those who say Judas Iscariot betrayed his Master because he was impatient. He followed Jesus Christ because he believed he was the new Messiah. He was sick and tired of the yoke of the oppressor.... "Let's drive the Romans into the sea. Palestine is our land, Palestine for Palestinians"... ..and he had reason to believe all along the line that Jesus was going to be that kind of Messiah. He was the most popular of all the heroes. It was something for a peasant to get five thousand people to assemble! But then one day the crowds began to grow thin, and Jesus began to say to them that His Kingdom was not of this world. Judas became impatient with the way of the Master. And so there are those who tell us he thought to himself, "I'll put Jesus in a position where He'll have to establish Himself with power and authority. He who can do so many wonderful miracles, I'll put Him now where, when He's backed into a corner, He'll have to call down from Heaven the fire, and there will be the thunder of troops." He had to have the Kingdom overnight, and he wasn't going to wait. That's the way some people tell us that Judas was.

And closely related to that, there are those who tell us that Judas Iscariot was obsessed with the notion that it had to be done his way, and he was about to defy even Jesus Christ who thought in terms of any other way than his.

It's quite difficult to find out exactly why Judas did what he did. Some tell us there isn't a completely satisfactory answer to this oft-asked question. It could be that Judas, once aware of the heinous thing that he did, despised

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himself to the very last breath that he drew. What you and I must always remember is that there's more than one toe hold that the Devil can use on us. Any one of which can eventually lead to betrayal. Since you and I don't know for certain just which one it was that perverted Judas, we have an advantage in this case, because this way we must be on our guard, taking forever seriously any and every overture that Satan makes. If Judas teaches any lesson it teaches this: that no sin can ever be taken lightly, because any sin eventually can lead to betrayal of Jesus Christ. Whether there's one sin or a number of sins, put them together and eventually it meant this: that he no longer trusted his Master. This is why I told you on Ash Wednesday, I'm never quite certain how seriously you take your sins. I know how seriously God takes them - - that's why He gave us His only begotten Son. God takes sin that seriously. I know the Church takes the fact of sin seriously. I know that's why we Lutherans, every time we invite you to worship, always begin at the same point...."We poor sinners - - "

Now let me go back and tell you what I said at the beginning of this sermon. Focus your attention upon Jesus Christ. You may rationalize if you wish, you may try to explain, you may even try to understand why Judas did what he did, but for whatever reason, the result is the same.....it was an evil thing.

Now how do you see Jesus Christ against this background of evil? He does not belittle Judas Iscariot. He does not call a special assembly of the eleven disciples and say, "I told you - I could have told you a long time ago, I could sense it....he was the Devil personified." Even Jesus Christ does not drag Judas down into the dust. Judas did that himself. God doesn't have to do it. But Jesus Christ stood there, and even in the night in which He was betrayed, invited Judas to the Holy Supper - - treated him exactly the same way He treated all the

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other disciples. Against this terrible thing which is Evil, you have the personification of perfect Love in Jesus Christ. Against the terrible deed that Judas does, you have Jesus Christ being faithful to His Father's will. And this is what you and I must remember. We may not always get the response that we wish. We may not even get the response we deserve, but we have no alternative - - as believers in God we must be faithful to what we know.

This is not an easy thing for us to accept, because you see, we believe so much in the Gospel, that we believe that there always has to be a return for what we invest in God's name. This is why I'm always wary of people who are looking for plus signs in the face of anything that they do for Jesus Christ. William McIntosh McKay, a good and faithful Scottish Bible student, once wrote a very interesting and fascinating book about the twelve disciples. It has the very good and proper title, "The Men Whom Jesus Made." When it comes to dealing with Judas Iscariot, the sub-title is "The Man Jesus Could Not Make." We who are success-conscious, we don't want to believe it. We refuse to accept the fact that even Jesus Christ couldn't make Judas Iscariot.

There are some pastors, I tell you, and I have a right to speak, knowing them as I do, who break down because they just can't accept the fact that there are people who are insensitive to the Gospel that they love to proclaim. There are some parents who are never equal to the fact that not every one of their children is going to respond in the same way to the thing that they offer to all of them. To John's credit, he gives us the facts as they were. The fact of life includes betrayal. But that's not the last word! In the face of this evil you have Jesus Christ, loving, treating equally well the betrayer and the denier.

Down deep inside of every one of us there is always a possible Judas. Who is it tells the story of a man who was commissioned to paint a study of the twelve disciples.....and he took his time until he found the right person for each of the twelve. How pleased he was when he discovered the man who would pose as John, with all the beatific qualities in his face. The last person to be painted was Judas Iscariot. And he knew exactly what he had to find in that man's eyes and in that man's features. And one day he found the man to serve as the model for Judas Iscariot.....and as he sat there - - the teller of the story relates that the painter said to himself, there's something about this man, remotely significant. You know how the story ends? The man posing as the Judas is the same man, a few years earlier, who had posed as John, the beloved disciple.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"JESUS AND ANNAS"

During these Sunday mornings in Lent we are concerning ourselves primarily with certain people who were part of the arrest, the denial, the betrayal and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Today's sermon deals with Jesus and Annas; the the text, the 12th and the 13th verses of the 18th chapter of John:

"Then the band and the captain and officers
of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him,
And led him away to Annas first; - - "

There's a peculiar aspect in human nature which seems never to be content until it can put its finger on the one most guilty, the one most responsible. Maybe it's because each of us realizes to a degree that we're all involved, and if we're going to be excused, then we're going to be excused only if we can find someone a bit more guilty than we. This trait reveals itself in human nature when we deal with the crucifixion, the betrayal, the arrest and the denial of Jesus. This is why we talk so much about Peter who denied, why we ever preached a sermon last Sunday about Judas, who betrayed. And then today, if you really want to feel a bit righteous, take a good long look at Annas, for, in my judgment at least, he's the culprit of culprits, the one most responsible, at least as far as strategy was concerned, of getting Jesus to Calvary.

Annas was a rascal. And as though that isn't enough to be said about a man, I have to add quickly two other things. One of them: he was an old man. It's one thing, maybe, to be a rascal while you're young, because then, you see, you can say it's part of recklessness and daring, it's part of immaturity and inexperience. But to be an old man, and to be a rascal - - that's something else,

and lamentably so.

....when this thing occurred in the life of Jesus, He was taken to Annas who was then seventy years of age, well-nigh twice the years of Jesus Christ. If I understand time at all, if I understand the gift of any new day, am I not constrained to look upon it as something that God gives us by which to make today a little bit better than yesterday. Don't we spell it out so magnificently in the liturgy of the Church - - "The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life - - - "....and if anything is to be recognized for what it is to be worth, it's God saying to us, "It's another chance, it's another opportunity for improvement." A man doesn't necessarily have to grow older and become worse. Hopefully in the sight of God a man should become older and better, if life is to teach us anything at all.....

....well, the one thing you say about Annas is, he's a rascal - - an old man who was a rascal.

He seemed always to have been that way. That's why when he came to the sunset years of life he was a rascal still. Maybe this gives us pause to ponder, you see, how important any sin is at any stage in life, because sin can be as the formation of a rut, and if one does not purge himself of it, if one does not come to recognize the error of his days before it's too late, then there is such a thing as the imprisonment of sin, the casting of a character, for which there's only one word at the end - - damnable! Annas was a rascal - - an old man who was a rascal.

Annas was a rascal. He was a churchman. And take it from me, my friend, as much as I dread to admit it, the worst kind of rascal is a religious rascal. And that's what Annas was. Twenty years before this he had gotten himself the high priesthood, by conniving, by greasing palms, by spending hour after hour in 'smoke-filled rooms' - - by playing this man as over against that man..... that's the way he did it. Everybody knew it!

And then when he could no longer be high priest, you know what he did? He fixed it so that each of his five sons in turn held the office. You don't get rascals like that every day. That's the kind Annas was, and all in the name of religion.....and then when he ran out of sons, rascal that he was, he saw to it that his daughter married the kind of a man that some day he could follow as a high priest. And that's the kind of man who was high priest before whom they took Jesus - - Caiaphas, the rascal, the son-in-law of a rascal who exploited his office, who purchased his office, who made it pay all that it could pay.

You remember that sermon that was preached, was it two weeks ago, about the Angry Jesus - - the man with a ship of cords in His hands, the man who actually fashioned an instrument of punishment which would draw blood from the backs of men - - how Jesus, completely infuriated, turned over the tables of the money-changers and drove them from the temple, with fire in His eye and thunder in His voice....and every inch a man. Well it was Annas and his kind who infuriated Jesus Christ. It was Annas who said, "We'll keep a thing going for us, we'll make a good thing of it." And they even called the temple area, at least a certain section of it, the Bazaars of Annas, the Shops of Annas, in the temple area, because this is what Annas did.

He knew that it was Jewish law that you offered for the sacrifice only the animal that was without spot and blemish. So Annas takes over the tribunal of the high priesthood and he says, "We'll lay down the laws. Every animal, then, will have to be inspected. We'll appoint the inspectors."how many animals, do you suppose, then, purchased on the outside, were free from spot and blemish? And then when they were rejected, Annas says, "All right, then, there's something else to be done. If we're going to play this game we play it all the way. We'll set up our own booths, we'll provide animals fit for the sacrifice, and they'll buy from us. We reject what they bring -- we force them to buy from us."

.....a rather convenient thing for the devout pilgrim, of course, except for one thing: when he bought his animal in the temple area he was forced to pay exactly twice as much as he might pay for an animal free from spot and blemish on the outside. Annas was a rascal, to bleed people, even within the temple area.

Annas was the kind of man who was not to be outdone by Jesus Christ. And when he learned what Jesus had done, the upstart from Galilee, turned over the tables of the money-changers -- this was too much for Annas. So Annas waits now, you see....he wasn't the high priest, but he's still a power to be reckoned with. He's the personification of Evil. So he arranges it, that he gets his licks in first. And so they bring Jesus -- God's only begotten Son, the personification of Love, bound like a common criminal, and he has to stand humiliated in front of a rascal called Annas.

In the days of impressionable youth I went off to Camp Nawakwa, not far from Gettysburg in the hills of the South Mountains of Adams County, as near a bit of heaven on earth as I've ever found. Then when our two weeks was over at

Camp Nawakwa we had the Sunday when we bid farewell to camp. So tremendously interested in us were they, that no youngster ever went away from camp without having a session with the counsellor. And I remember that one last day in camp when the man stood alongside of me....I, shall I tell you now, who was so in love with life, who believed so much in the basic goodness of every single human being, who honestly believed that anyone and everyone, at any time, anywhere, could be trusted.....and then I got the shock, the shock of those tender years. "I tell you," said the counsellor, "I'm giving you a bit of advice as you go down from this place called Nawakwa. You're going to have, perchance, another whole year before you get back here. But brace yourself, not everyone is as good as you think they are. Not everyone is as honest as you think they are."

....it was bitter medicine to take. Yet my daily prayer remains, that with the Quaker of old I might always look for that which is of God in every man.

Yet, maybe it's equally important to look for that which is of evil in every man! To be able to discern God is a blessed thing; to be able to discern evil may be a necessary thing. Now, a few years later, I look at it entirely differently. For you see, even our Blessed Lord could turn to Peter, one of His beloved disciples, and say, "Get thee behind me -- Satan!"

Now you may ask the question, as well you should. Why should God ever allow Annas and his kind to have their day? Why should evil be let loose in this world? This is a problem that troubles many people. If God is good, how can He allow rascals to maneuver, to manipulate, to exploit? But it so happens that God can never be less than the kind of God that He is. He is a God who loves us. He is, if I may put it this way, and it's not a matter of condescension, a God who is

the kind of God that we need, the kind of God we ought to have. So when God made us, He made us with a measure of free will. He said, "You can choose: you can become good - - and I'll help you; you can become evil - - and I'll punish you. But the choice is yours!"

He isn't the kind of God seated in Heaven above who simply pulls strings, and then automatically we say "Thank you - please - thank you - thank you - - thank you very kindly." He isn't the kind of a God who pulls a string, and then you couldn't be bad if you wanted to be! He's the kind of God who made us, so that there would be times when He Himself has to stand by the side and take all of our rebukes, all of our brazen reaction, all of our insults. But He never wanted you to be good just automatically, even though you might choose to go to Hell deliberately. His love is that great.

And when a God makes a world out of love like that, you run the risk of getting an Annas. And there he is - - people who condemn the innocent, even before they are tried. Some people are condemned before they appear before the court. This fact may tell far more indicting things about the court than it does about the accused. So it was with Jesus and Annas.

Annas made a mockery of justice. For him it had to be that way because he was the kind of person he was. What happens when Jesus waits without any hope of justice? He stands His ground firmly and patiently. For Him it has to be that way because Truth has only one story to tell and fortunately the final decision in its favor comes from the Court from which Annas and his kind are forever disqualified. This I most certainly believe.

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"JESUS AND PETER"

Today's sermon in the Lenten series is another dealing with the study of personalities involved in the arrest, the denial and the betrayal of Jesus Christ. It bears the title, "Jesus and Peter"; and the text could be the 27th verse of the 18th chapter of John:

"Peter then denied again - - "

I'm not going to give you the full quotation at once. I'll only give you part of it, and I can predict immediately your reaction. It will be far more gleeful than it ought to be. Remember now, it's only part of the quotation - - "Every saint has his past - - - "

There's something in human nature that knows a measure of delight in having this said about some good person. You hear the rattle of skeletons, you see, you picture the washing of dirty linen in public, you see dragging out in front of other people all the things, you see, that make you feel a little bit more virtuous; because while you're not quite as good as he, you never said you were! Why, then, should he ever have pretended to be more than he was? Take a look at that past! - - there's that night, there's that sordid chapter. It's because there's something down deep inside of us that always makes much of the malicious, that's always quickest to hear the diabolical. But whenever we talk about Peter - - invariably we say, "Oh yes, Peter, who denied" and with a kind of a love-less breath we brand Judas "the betrayer" - - we brand Peter "the denier".

We are the label givers, as though we'd done the day's work, you see,

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when we've tagged somebody, when to our own satisfaction we said, "That's the kind of person he is" - and never perhaps allowing ourselves a moment in reflection to say, "and how can I identify with him? - how can I perhaps help to make the picture better than it is?".....rather than walk away and say he has feet of clay - - never for a solitary second permitting myself to believe that even halos need not be out of style for those who have feet of clay.

You're entitled to the second part of the quotation. The first part: "Every saint has a past - - " ...get ready..."every sinner his future." This, too, is the reading of life through Christian lens. If I understand the basic meaning of the Christian faith at all, if I know anything at all about the basic purpose and intent of Jesus Christ, it's primarily this: that all of life with its wide spectrum has to be read simultaneously, that if you see the base, you must also see the possibility of blessedness.....if you see the saint, you may also see the sinner, but most certainly if you see the sinner, you must see the possibility of a saint.

These sermons, significantly enough, are titled "Jesus and Peter" - not "Peter and Jesus"....."Jesus and Annas" - not "Annas and Jesus"....."Jesus and Judas" - not "Judas and Jesus." For the central figure in the drama must always be Jesus Christ. The important thing, no matter how heinous it may be, is not what we do to Jesus, but what He goes on doing in and for and through us, despite our diabolical deeds. This is the one redeeming thing, that it is Jesus and Peter.

Now when you read it that way, you'll understand, won't you, why I've come to this sacred desk - - to speak a good word in behalf of a man who denied his Master. Oh, don't feel over-anxious about it at all, I shan't gloat over

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the facts at all! I will admit that He denied his Master, I will admit that it was a terrible thing to have done. This I will not ignore. But I want to tell you something about the kind of man who found himself in a situation where he denied his Master. Every now and then it has to be put this way: there is a limit beyond which a human being cannot go. There is a certain kind of pressure which the frail human flesh cannot withstand. No matter how noble the intentions may be, a man is still a human being. What, then, is God's way with human flesh? It's forever to be charitable.

Now let me go back and be the defender for a man who denied. For you see, every prisoner has his hour in court, and every sinner has his chance to appear before the Judge who is merciful. This is the good thing to be said about him. He loved Jesus Christ greatly. If it can be said in the Scriptures that John is the one whom Jesus loved, then Peter, of all the disciples, is the disciple who loved Jesus. The record said all the disciples forsook Him and ran away.....but then there were two of them who had their graver periods; they all forsook Him and fled....but then two of them came out of the hiding places. They walked, maybe at some distance, as Jesus was pushed along to the place of the high priest. And one of them, John, not generally named, had an entree into the court of the high priest - he got inside, only to discover that his bosom friend, Peter, was not with him. There are those who tell us that he had a way of reporting to the porter, the keeper of the gate, "If you see a man who looks like Peter, get him inside, will you?".....and Peter got inside the gate. His nobler motivation constrained him to be as near his Master as he could be.

Then it happened. Three times they came to him - - pressure being built

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upon pressure. Three times he denied his Master. But this was the man who wanted to be there within sight of his Master because he loved Him. Then the moment of weakness came...and he capitulated. This is the man who earlier had been in the Garden and reached for his sword and cut off the ear of the soldier who came to take his Master. This is the man who found himself, despite his noblest intentions, weakening. That's the way it happened.

Let me rise to the full stature that I can as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and tell you quickly upon this: that God never consigns a man to the tortures of the damned on the basis of one single misdeed that he performs. Jesus Christ turned and looked at Peter when the cock began to crow the third time, and to this very day there are those who say it was a look of compassion and a look of pity, not a look of condemnation. And this is what you and I must remember.

They were a lot to be pitied, those early Christians. How cruel we can be with sinners. It's a weakness of human nature that we never have done with some people's past. We forever go parading it in front of them. How they themselves hate it, and we keep reminding about it. Those early Christians were to be pitied, because if we can believe the legend, that's the kind of treatment they gave Peter. And you know what they used to say, the people who remembered how Christ had predicted the crowing of the rooster, that when Peter would walk by, even after the days after the Resurrection, without looking him straight in the eye, they'd imitate the crowing of a rooster....humiliation upon humiliation, that's what they did.

For shame upon them. Deny he did, but a man must be judged by the whole tenor of his life. In the court where Jesus Christ is judge it's never the

single deed that's on trial. Jesus Christ as judge deals with the man himself.....who is this man who has done this evil thing?

....this man who has done this evil thing -- why

has he done it?

.....this man who has done this evil thing -- is

there any possibility that the future can be better?

Christ reckons not with man's failures as such. His primary concern is with the man, with the kind of man who does the failing.

Don't you dare misunderstand me. Christ hates sin. And you cannot minimize the diabolical aspect of Peter's denial. But Christ is not the kind of man who brands a person and then walks away. I used to think how wonderful it would be to be an evangelist, that is, to set up for yourself a three-night stand somewhere, preach, proclaim the Gospel, the Law and the Gospel, fire and brimstone -- how bravely one could do it when he didn't have to stay with the people after he had preached it. It's the easiest thing in the world to brand a man a sinner! But with the qualities of redeeming Love, which spelled out in large letters means love and trust and patience -- this is something else.

The sermon is entitled "Jesus and Peter." That's why after Peter had denied, Jesus caught his eye. That's why on that Resurrection morning, the first message that Jesus had for His disciples, for the people who came -- "Go, tell them that I'm alive" and then He added so graciously and magnificently -- "Tell Peter." This is the kind of God we have.

I used to keep on my desk in the beginning years of my ministry a clipping. It appeared in a church magazine. It was a story about a woman who had

been a woman with a past. Everybody in the town knew what kind of woman she was. Then one day a miracle happened -- she gave her life to Jesus. She hated her past, but she believed that she was washed white in the blood of the Lamb. And then she said, I've got to praise my Lord -- I've got to be, now, with people who love Him....I've got to go where His word is read and His truth is proclaimed. So she did what she thought was the natural thing, she went to church. One Sunday, two Sundays....there was the back-biting, there was the whispering, there was the obvious shunning of the woman. But she did come back the third Sunday....only to get more of the same. And then she cried out, with anguish of soul -- "Isn't there anywhere in all of God's earth where a person who was a sinner can be accepted for a better future?" God's way with us is never to deny us. We may deny Him, but then He waits for godly contrition and sorrow and gives us His hand.

Let me read for you the way Elizabeth Barrett Browning put it when she tried to interpret the meaning of the look that Jesus gave to Peter.....

"The cock crows coldly. -- Go, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear!
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here --
My voice to God and angels shall attest,
Because I know this man, let him be clear."

In God's reading of life, He who sees the broad spectrum and reads it all simultaneously, the baseness and the blessedness -- every saint may have his past.....God in Christ guarantees every sinner can have a future. That's enough to put a spring in your step, my friend, and to make you sing the song of the redeemed.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"JESUS AND PILATE"

Today's sermon, another in the series during Lent dealing with the personalities involved in the trial, the arrest, the betrayal and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, bears the title, "Jesus and Pilate". The text, in fact there could be two verses from Scripture, the 19th chapter of John, the 4th and then the 16th verse:

"Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him."

....and then that 16th verse, hour after hour later:

"Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away."

We Lutherans take pride in the fact that one of the most distinguished theologians of our day is a man named Joseph Sitler. It's a pity that Pontius Pilate never had the chance to sit at the feet of a man like Sitler; for in one of his lectures Sitler said -- he couldn't have said it better -- there comes a time when a man must do what he ought to do. Of course, it didn't take mankind to wait through the chapters of history until a man like Sitler should come along to say it. When God planted within the soul of each of us a thing called conscience, this kind of thing is always being echoed and re-echoed in our hearts. A man must do what he ought to do.

Pontius Pilate is a study of a man who knew what he ought to do but did not do it. How is this possible? Why will a man refuse to do what he knows is right? And in the meantime, what happens to him? What is the pattern of

his behavior, he who will not be brave enough and bold enough to decide and to take a stand in behalf of what is right?

Suppose for the moment you ask God to give you now a sanctified imagination. It could be a treasured thing that you could possess in your soul. And if you had such a sanctified imagination, pretend now that you were there, you turn back the centuries -- you're a spectator in Jerusalem, you're an innocent bystander.....

.....you're attracted by the fact that a crowd has gathered. You wonder what's going on. You're told that a man is going to be tried, that life and death is to be decided in behalf of one man....

"Oh, it's a court trial, is it?" you say, and you begin looking for the prisoner. What does he look like? You say, "That man over there is the prisoner -- not that man! Why, he doesn't look as though he could harm a flea! He doesn't look as though he could even think an evil thought! Surely not that man the prisoner -- why, he looks as though he has a heart, a heart as big as God! -- not that man! -- surely he'll be declared innocent!"

....but then you look around and you say, "Who's going to be the judge in this case? Who's trying this man?" And in walks Pontius Pilate. The case is brought before the governor. And you look him over..... yes, you size him up. He has all the earmarks of a career politician, he has all the earmarks of a man who knows that he lives from day to day by the response of the people.

Some people are transparent. You can see right through them. You can

understand exactly why they say what they had said. But the more you look Pontius Pilate over, you're forced to admit that this man isn't transparent. Because as the trial goes on, it's the old, old game of ...will he, or won't he?

...will he, or won't he?

.....will he, or won't he?

At first Pontius Pilate gives the impression that there isn't much of a case here at all! Well, if that should be the impression that you get, then maybe he's going to let the man off, because Pontius Pilate had come in and had told them that, "I don't want to try the case."

But they said, "You've got to try it because nobody else can try this man - - we can't do it. We tell you, he's guilty." You see, they branded him that way even before he had a hearing.

Well, there's Pontius Pilate. You remember what I told you about him at the beginning of this sermon: he's the case history of a man who knew what was right but refused to do what was right.

Psychologists tell us, and you can well afford to listen to them on this score - - psychologists tell us that if you ever have a noble impulse, act on it at once! Don't put off acting on what is noble in your soul. Pontius Pilate, we are led to believe, had his noble impulses. You see, this wasn't the first case that he had ever tried, and this wasn't his first night in Jerusalem. He had been in Judea for quite a while and he knew something about mob psychology and he had sentenced enough people, guilty or innocent, yet he knew when a man was innocent, he knew when a man was guilty....no matter what he decreed, he wasn't that insensitive, and he knew something about reading

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the mind of a mob. So undoubtedly, as soon as he came in, he saw Jesus Christ, the personification of innocence - - as soon as he heard the murmuring of the mob he began to question their motivation. When he listened to the shouts of some of their leaders he knew at once that their charges were not reliable. Pontius Pilate knew all of this! But he delayed in doing the right thing, and the longer he delayed, the more the noble impulse evaporated, until he found himself in the position where he couldn't do the right thing.

Strange as it may seem, there may be such a thing as the tide of the spirit, the tide which is more favorable for doing the right thing than at other times. Even fate itself may work against a good man's noble intentions.

What does a man do, then, when he's not about to do the right thing? Well, you can read this nineteenth chapter of the Gospel according to John for yourself. You can find the whole drama there in those twelve verses. Begin with verse 4, go all the way to verse 16.....begin with the man who says, "I find no fault in him," and end with the man who says, "Go ahead and take him and kill him." Ultimately he makes the decision, he who tried not to make a decision.

How does it develop?

Well, point one: he tried to keep from getting involved. When you know what's right and you don't want to do it, then you gather up your skirts and you try to keep a safe distance. This was his immediate reaction: "I don't want to try the case, I don't want to have a thing to do with it. Handle this the way you want to yourselves."

....life has a way of saying to a man, but you've got to become involved. Life does not provide for spectators. Life provides only

an arena. So they cried out to Pontius Pilate, "We can't try him. You've got to try him."

Well, then, what does he do? All right, he decides what he thinks is a very clever thing....I'll ask leading and loaded questions....I'll so put the prisoner in a position where he'll fasten the noose around his own neck -- I won't have to decide, he'll write his own decision!

....so with all of his cleverness, he asks the leading and the loaded questions. But Jesus Christ is not to be intimidated, not by any ten-cent governor.

Then what does he do? He says, All right, I'll come back every now and then and say to the multitude, this mob, I don't find any fault in him, and then maybe they'll say to me, Well, if you don't find any fault in him, why don't we forget the whole matter? Still Pontius Pilate doesn't make the decision, but puts them in the place where they make the decision and he can go his way free from involvement on that score.

....but that doesn't work. The pressure of the mob has built up....

they're not about to forget.

Then he says, All right, I'll try this one for size: I'll make a half decision. They want his life; I'll decree a kind of procedure that leaves him half dead. So Pontius Pilate says, let him be scourged. So the soldiers came, they took their sticks, you see, with their strips of leather studded with metal, and they lashed him, leaving him there bleeding and broken..... half dead. Maybe the sight of this much blood will satisfy them, and they'll begin to disperse and go away.

....but it didn't work that way.

Pontius Pilate comes back still wavering. All right, he says, I'll make a bargain with you. Let me suggest to you what you could do. Why don't you come to me and say, "Governor, you haven't forgotten, have you, that this is the time of year when you're accustomed to releasing one of the prisoners?"....and then Pontius Pilate is suggesting, you see, that they say to him, "In this holiday season, we can be gracious, we can be merciful - - let Jesus go."

....but it doesn't work that way! They're willing to have somebody released, but not Jesus. And they cry for Barabbas....and they force the hand of Pontius Pilate.

Barabbas is allowed to go scot free, and Pontius Pilate still has Jesus Christ on his hands. The man who is crying out in the name of God himself, that all that's right and decent should be done. Pilate sees his duty but does not do it.

But be fair with him, won't you. Again he comes out, and he says, I find no fault with him....hoping, now, that they'll say, All right, let's forget it. It's gone long enough.....

That's the way it might have gone, if it hadn't been that now they touched Pontius Pilate at the spot where he's most vulnerable. They say, "If you let him go, you're not Ceasar's friend." And the one thing that any governor always wanted most for himself was to be characterized as the friend of the Emperor - - his very job was at stake, his whole future was involved, and whether or not he had the smile of the Emperor thrown upon him.

Now for Pontius Pilate, who had dilly-dallied long enough, the man who once had a noble intention - - his time is over. For it's no longer a case

of whether or not he does what's right. Now it's a case of having to do what's expedient. For Pontius Pilate read them, read through their faces, read through their hearts, and knew exactly that if anybody trumped up a charge against him in this regard, they'd send Jewish embassy off to visit with the Emperor and they'd say, "You can't trust Pontius Pilate. We brought a man who by every indication was a disturber of the people -- he even called himself a Messiah!" And that's one thing the Emperor didn't want to hear, that an upstart from Galilee who called himself the promised Messiah should appear before one of his governors, and then be dismissed. Even the Emperor couldn't afford that kind of treatment.

So you have Pontius Pilate standing in front of him. And the one thing that he couldn't afford to allow was to have somebody tamper with his past. They knew his maladministration of justice, they knew of his extortion, they knew of his bribes, they knew of his inhuman treatment to people....this is the kind of man he had been. And as soon as they say, "There is this possibility that we parade all of your past in front of the Emperor," -- Pontius Pilate capitulates, compromises with the mob...."Go ahead and take him."

One never knows when he may have to pay the heaviest price for his past mistakes. Pilate, then, is the case history of a man who compromised with those who remembered his past. Shall we feel sorry for him? How can we, when we know that his lack of courage spelled out the crucifixion of Jesus Christ -- when even hand-washing meant ever so decisively the drawing of innocent blood -- -- ? Moral? Of course there is a moral. Any sin, soon or late, can mean hellish business!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"JESUS AND BARABBAS"

Sunday by Sunday this Lenten-tide we've been thinking about the personalities involved in the trial, the arrest and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Today's sermon is "Jesus and Barabbas." The text, it's the 40th verse of the 18th chapter of John:

"Then cried they all again, saying,
Not this man, but Barabbas. Now
Barabbas was a robber."

Let me begin by quoting for you a half-truth. It can very easily turn into a lie. It's an old Latin proverb that continues to be quoted: "Vox populi, vox Dei." - - "The voice of the people is the voice of God." It's a slogan, you see, and history has always had its slogan-maker. Slogan-makers have not always served us well. It is not always true that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Calvary remains the grim reminder of what happens when people are given a chance to decide the right or the wrong, the evil or the good. For this essentially was the choice between Barabbas and a man from Nazareth.

Let me fill you in very quickly with the historical background. You have to link this sermon with last Sunday's sermon. Jesus Christ is appearing before Pontius Pilate, and Pontius Pilate finds himself with Jesus Christ on his hands. Pilate had a way of asking all the right questions, never quite succeeding in getting a right answer. His question of questions was: What will I do with Jesus? He should have known that he had to take a stand. He should have known that he could not escape making a decision. But Pilate remains as the sad example of a man who thinks he can put off dealing with conscience,

who think that it's absolutely possibly to waver and to hedge and to hesitate.

I tell you this morning with all the ardor of my soul, that good seldom comes from wavering, from hesitating. When a man finds himself encountered

....and they think they can hesitate and put off the kind of decision, that man is a fool, and in the end he may spell out a lot of

That's precisely what happened to Pontius Pilate. Again and again he said, "Not today.".....again and again he said, "Not now".....again and again he said, "I will not formally take his side - - I'll hedge, I'll waver, I'll manipulate, I'll maneuver, I'll even exploit the people round about me and force them to decide rather than myself." And so he thought, clever that he was, this was the way it could be done.

And when he had tried other things, now, he said, I'll turn him over to the people, I'll let the people decide. Working in his behalf, in this particular direction, however, was the custom of the Jews that at Passover time, being mindful of what God had done for them in the past, they'd give some true evidence of how they remembered that God had dealt graciously with them, so the least that they would do would be to say, "We will set one prisoner free, mindful of the fact that God had set us, the prisoners, free." So building upon this, and about to exploit it now (and a very clever political trick it was)....Pontius Pilate says, "You people decide. You can have a man called Barabbas or you can have a man called Jesus of Nazareth. You make the choice."

One of the difficult things in life is that important decisions are not always easy to make. I've long since gotten over believing that life is al-

ways to be seen clearly. Maybe it's the first sign of maturity that one becomes patient with those who have to decide on what they believe to be right. And it's not always easy, but that doesn't remove from us the obligation to make the decision. I want you to understand, in all fairness to them, how difficult their decision was. Standing in front of them was Barabbas. He was mighty attractive. He was every inch a man, the personification of all that's masculine and daring and bold.

You know what kind of man he was? He wasn't just an ordinary robber -- you have to read more than just the words that John gives you -- he wasn't the petty pilferer, he wasn't a bicycle thief. Barabbas was no ordinary robber. He was a brigand, he was the leader of a band of insurrectionists. He had great zeal as a patriot. He went around and made known that whenever he could find a handful of people who would follow him, he would lead them in a bath of blood -- he'd drive the occupying authority into the sea. That's the kind of man he was.

In fact, already to prove his point, he had killed a man. And this had landed him in prison. And being in prison, you see, was just an intermediate step until he could reach his great objective. He was a rebel with a cause, and he knew what his cause was.

Now to better appreciate the kind of man he was, let me fill you in with this detail. Rome had come and taken Judea over. They were the occupying authority. Rome had a great empire to be supported. They had to be supported by their subject powers. And so they began to bleed them as much as they could, to drain off as much taxation as was possible. And in order to get this, they would look to this Jew and they'd look to that Jew, and they'd say to him, you can represent us, and you get as much taxation as the traffic will

stand....we'll make a bargain with you, we'll assure you a kind of commission. It will be worth your while.....

Barabbas and his kind couldn't stomach the kind of Jew who would sell himself out in this way to those in authority. And Barabbas made it known that if ever he found a tax-collector, an instrument of the Roman empire, he would go to that person and threaten him, persecute him, and persuade him in any way that he possibly could to have done with this kind of business. And Barabbas even allowed it to be known that if he could not persuade a tax-collector with words, if he could not intimidate him, then he would even kill him, if this should be necessary. This is the kind of man Barabbas was. No wonder he appealed to them.

On the other hand, here was Jesus Christ.

You know how much I love Him. I know how much you love Him. But see Him now as He appeared at that moment.....

....He was bent over. He was bleeding. He was broken.

Just before this Pontius Pilate had issued a decree that He was to be scourged. I told you last Sunday what that was -- the soldiers came with a club-like instrument, with strips of leather-studded by metal objects, and then they'd lash away at the body of the prisoner, leaving him of course with broken bones, and bleeding.

....this was their other choice.....a man half dead

....over here, the personification of all that's masculine, daring, patriotic.

But that isn't the whole story. You know they preferred Barabbas. But let it be plainly and fairly said now that they did not prefer him but of

ignorance. They knew exactly the kind of man that he was. But Jesus -- they weren't so sure that they knew. He was so different! There was so much about Him that they couldn't quite figure out.

Do I reveal a secret to you, my friend, when I tell you that for most of us, we're always afraid of what we can't quite figure out. That's why we are the label-givers. You become so secure, you see, once we label somebody as something.....

-- "He's a liberal" ...and we brand him, and we walk away....

we have figured him out, we've put him in a particular slot, and then according to our own reaction to that kind of a label, we have done a day's work....

-- "He's a conservative"

-- "He's reckless"

....and then every now and then, when we can't think of anything else uncomplimentary and because there's something quite enigmatic about this kind of patriotism that the man could have, and his passion for social justice, and we're not so sure that we like it....

-- "He's a Communist"

...and we become so secure -- we, the label-givers.

But when we can't label someone easily, that's a different story. This is what they found themselves always feeling about Jesus. They'd send delegations to him, they'd say, "Jesus, who are you? We've never seen your kind, we don't know where to catalogue you, we don't know where to put you, we don't know what to think of you." And then you know the record, how He'd stand up

to preach and He'd tell them something....and they couldn't understand what He was saying, and then He'd have to explain what He was saying, and they couldn't quite understand His explanation.....

....and so there are always those who reject what they can quite possibly figure out, or what they can't quite possibly manage -- someone who just doesn't easily fit into their narrow and limited minds. There now, -- my friend, there's a sin for you! -- a real sin. And goodness only knows how it goes by any number of different names in our day.

So they had to make their choice: a man who might have gone by the slogan "My country, right or wrong -- but wrong or right, my country"

"BUT GO - - "

The sermon on this Easter Day has a title consisting of only two words, "But Go - - ." It's recorded in the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John, as a portion of the 17th and 18th verses:

"Jesus said unto her, But go, tell
my brethren - - "

This sermon today deals with the Resurrection truth. There are several things that have to be said. To begin with, let it be clearly established in our minds, the Resurrection did occur.

How strange, you say, that we ought to say that to ourselves. Yet ever since it happened there have always been those who said it didn't occur. Ever since it happened there have always been those who acted as though it never happened. They reject it, they ignore it, they deny its fact.

We who are part of the twentieth century, interestingly enough with all of our emphasis upon science, are having it bandied about quite a bit these days that 'God is dead.' Small wonder then, that this sermon on this day in this place, in your presence, should begin by saying it did happen.

Oh, I'll grant you that you can't quite prove it scientifically, but man does not live, nor love, nor die scientifically. Man is forever motivated by his dreams, his fears, so easily beset by his frustrations. Grateful as I am, grateful as you may be for all the blessings of science, yet the day will never come when you or I shall seek to comfort or to console someone and say, "Science is my shepherd; I shall not want."

I have deliberately in recent days kept from dragging into this pulpit reflections or observations or impressions upon this "God is dead" theology.

It isn't that I haven't read what they have been saying, it isn't that I haven't tried to school myself in their notions, their concepts. It's simply that I know that in every age and generation there have always been those who have said that type of thing. And I've lived long enough to honestly believe that life has a way of proving the existence of God. Proud, arrogant man that he may be, with all of his emphasis upon reason, and no matter how much he may dedicate himself to humanism, life has a way of driving us to our knees, to the extent that somewhere, somehow, if we've never said it before, we'll cry out - - "God!" "God!"

I have my second thoughts, however, upon this whole business of science not always being enthusiastic about accepting the fact of God, because there are some things you just don't put into a test-tube and tie up into a very neat formula, and yet I say to myself, science looks for results. Science is always looking for something by which it can measure gain - - it considers one experiment after another, which is one series of results after another.....and I say to myself, why, this is precisely why I believe in the fact of the Resurrection! - - because I see the kind of thing that is the result of belief in the Resurrection. The Scriptures put it majestically and precisely when they say that "they lived in the power of the Resurrection." This is why I accept the fact that Jesus Christ is alive, because I've seen Him come alive in the hearts and souls of men. Death does not transform - - only life vitalizes.

The early church made the doctrine of the Resurrection central because they knew exactly what happened in the lives of people who went on living as though Jesus Christ was alive. And every now and then, whether you like

it or not, you've got to accept something as gospel truth because you happen to believe the people who tell you, and you see what has happened in their lives because they happen to believe it.

A distinguished churchman, one of America's finest preachers, made a journey into the Middle East. The people who were in charge of his itinerary were very happy when they were able to schedule him for an address before a group of students in Cairo. The man in charge made it his business to say to Dr. Fosdick, "You'll allow me to give you a bit of advice, won't you? We've had Christians address this student body before. Now, this student body is made up of many people of a variety of religious beliefs and convictions, and for some reason, whether for good or for ill, they usually look upon a Christian as someone who is going to exploit them, and very deliberately want to convert them from what they believe, so that they can put their name on the roster of the Christian church. If you begin to speak in this manner, they're going to be on the defensive, and they're going to prejudice their minds against you, if at once you try to convince them that they ought to become Christians."

Dr. Fosdick was sure of his faith. He profited by the advice that was given to him, and having been introduced, he went to the rostrum, and in this very masterful way began....

"I have not come here this morning to ask any of
you to change your religion"

...but being sure of his faith, he very quickly added these words,

" - - but I have come here to ask any man, whatever
his religion is, - - is your religion changing you?"

This is always the glory of the Christian faith. The man whose life is empowered by belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the man who lives the redeemed life.

I tell you again, we've lived long enough, haven't we, that we accept as gospel truth certain things that are told us because we happen to believe the person who tells it. I believe in the Resurrection, I believe in the ever-present reality of Jesus Christ because I could name for you person after person whose life is testimony to the fact.

On Tuesday of this week I shall be back in my home town. I shall go back to the village church in which I was baptized, in which I was confirmed, and where in the impressionable years of my life I first heard the Gospel preached. And on Tuesday of this week I shall gather with people who will fill that church to overflowing capacity, and there we shall conduct the Order for the Burial of the Dead for the man who baptized me, for the man who confirmed me, for the man who first spoke to me about the challenge of being a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I know exactly what I'll be thinking when I'll be there in Bethany Church. I'll be thinking, how foolish they are who say God is dead! How foolish they are who say that Jesus Christ is not God! For here in the presence of one whom we honor I found something in that man who unto the day that I die will enable me to say...."How do I know He's alive? I found Him in that Pastor."

This is the first thing that has to be said about the Resurrection: it occurred.....it actually happened. And how do I know? They told me. And why do I believe it? Because their lives have reflected the character and

quality of an eternal dimension. My pastor was always something more to me than just a man. He was a man in whom God had become alive. So I accept the fact of the Resurrection.

The next thing that has to be said about the Resurrection is this: that when it happened, it happened very quietly. You know that when you came to church this morning, during this hour and each of the succeeding hours, we've been dramatizing the fact of the Resurrection. Several years ago, when we first decided to include the trumpeters with the majestic strains of the organ, we said, we hope our people will understand that there were no trumpets on that first Easter Day - - no, nor was there a choir. In fact, there was no formidable assembly of people! I am in duty bound to remind you that when the Resurrection first occurred, it was made known only to one person. Let me give you the details.

Her name was Mary....a woman that had a past, but Jesus Christ gave her a future. It made all the difference in the world. And when they had taken the body of Jesus and put it in the grave, she couldn't stay away - - she had to keep her rendezvous. Daringly and recklessly so, she went alone to the Resurrection garden. She found out that the grave was empty. Bewildered and confused, she ran back looking for two men that she felt she could trustPeter and John.

Excitedly they came with her and went back. They looked.....yes -- the grave was empty. Typical manlike fashion - - a fact is a fact - - a thing is a thing. He isn't here - - He isn't here.

So the men turned around and went home.

Mary stayed on. I suppose from the dawn of time women have always felt that

men never understood them. Presumably there was an ache in her heart - - how could it be? How could they just walk away? Love, you see, in this woman's heart must keep its rendezvous, and so in all of her loneliness she stays there.

And then, bravely enough, she enters inside the grave, and blinded by tears, then she hears a voice. God always speaks to those who wait for His appearing. He isn't here.....then she turns around and she sees someone that she thinks is a gardener and she says,

"It's my Lord that I want - - it's my Lord.

What have you done with Him? Where have you taken Him?"

The One who was standing there is the resurrected Christ!

...and He simply says to her, "Mary!"

...and that's the way the first person found out about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It happened as quietly, as simply, as naturally, as personally as all that! - - a woman's faith being rewarded - -

....God calling her by name.....Mary being made aware of the presence of Jesus Christ.

And this is the thing that must be said again and again, this is the way the reality of Jesus Christ becomes made known to us - - personally - - each man must know it for himself. I cannot know for you the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ. There are some things in life when you yourself must say "I see." There are some things in life when you yourself must say, "I know." What a precious thing it must have been for Mary, then, when she could say, "My Lord." Now she had a prized and a cherished moment. She

had Jesus Christ all to herself. And I tell you with all the ardor of my soul, this can happen to you and it can happen to me, when in some sublime moment you and I become aware that there are only two in the world -- Jesus, and me. It happens personally.

But I warn you, while it happens personally, Jesus Christ is never yours exclusively. And this, too, is part of the message of the Resurrection truth. When I first became your Pastor, shortly thereafter a couple came to me to be married. There were certain questions raised about the propriety of their marriage. With some counselling, there was no doubt in my mind but what I would walk with them to the very shadow of this altar and pronounce them man and wife in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

There was a woman, at that time a member of this congregation, who sat in judgment upon that couple, and with a wicked mind (I know whereof I speak) came to me and told me I had no right to marry them. And she said, "Furthermore, I defy you to marry them in front of my altar." She may have had her moments when she entered this church all by herself and prayed to the living God within the shadow of this altar, and no matter how precious that moment may have been for her, it became a damnable thing when she confined the Christ of this altar to her and to herself alone.

You and I always run this risk. It's a precious thing to know that Christ is yours and you are Christ's, and there are times when this has to happen. But you can't keep Christ exclusively to yourself. So therefore, God seemingly gives us little time to stand idle, even in adoration. With understandable reluctance, Mary didn't give any indication of a rapid rush on her part to get out of the Resurrection garden. How she must have prized that treasured and

exclusive moment with the gloriously-appearing Lord. But the Master said
- - "Go - - get on your way - - tell the others." They, too, must know
the full story of God's latest act.

- - - anyone here for a quick start in order that the story may be
told? It is the dashing mark of a good disciple, you know!

I pose as a prophet now.....

In the Day of Judgment you might have two questions put to you.

One: "Do you know that God is ever alive in Jesus

Christ and is your Saviour?"

....and to that question, hopefully you'll answer, Yes.

But be prepared for a second question:

"Having known this wonderful truth, to whom else
have you told it?"

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 17, 1966

"A MAN CALLED THOMAS"

This is another in the year's series of sermons based upon passages from the Fourth Gospel. Today's sermon bears the title, "A Man Called Thomas;" the text is from the Gospel for the day, it's the 24th verse of the 20th chapter of John:

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not
with them when Jesus came."

It was just about this time last year when we began the first phase in our Property Improvement Program. In practically each succeeding week since then we've been busy around Saint Luke Church, inside and out, adding the touches that are part of that program. The last phase in this Property Improvement Program will be made evident in the place where we are right now. The painters will be coming to re-paint the walls, and then you will find added a very distinctive touch for the altar. For the front of the altar a wood carver has prepared for us a panel, in sculpture of wood, of the Last Supper. Significantly enough, when the individual comes to kneel at the altar, either as an adult at the time of his baptism, or as one in the impressionable years of his youth, when he comes at the time of his confirmation, or as one committed to Jesus Christ, who kneels at the altar to receive the Sacrament....there at eye level he will have superimposed in front of him at the altar, done magnificently in wood, a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper.

It's part of the dream that Mr. DeLong, our architectural consultant, has had in mind for us. It was he, as some of you know, who designed our altar

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and our chancel furnishings for us, back when the bhurch was built. In these twenty years that have come and gone, we've always hoped that certain touches would be completed to the dream that he had years ago, It is right and proper that when a person comes to receive the Sacrament, and that as he kneels within the very shadow of the altar, that at eye level there should be for him this interpretation of our blessed Lord, with the company of disciples. Significantly enough, this hand-carved wak sculpture was delivered to Saint Luke Church on Holy Thursday night. It's now in the offices, waiting until it can be placed. Hopefully until that time (it's the last thing to be put in order, by the way,) hopefully until that time maybe small groups of us can gather together and study it. Mr. DeLong has written that he has done this in his home, when the sculptor delivered it there in Philadelphia where he lives, and he invited at least three or four groups of people to come in and spend several hours just looking at the excellent detail in this wood carving.

And the more you look at it, the more you discover the excellent features. This has been my experience at least, as on two different occasions I've deliberately stolen time from a busy day just to go in and sit by myself and look at this oak carving. I want to share with you at once an immediate reaction.

The soonest of all the things to occur to me when I looked at it was that our blessed Lord is surrounded by twelve men, twelve different men. The carver has even brought out in the faces of the individuals distinctive traits and characteristics....what he has done with their feet, what he's done with

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their hands, what he's done with their faces. And in the preparation of the sermon for the Sunday after Easter I was tremendously caught up with the way the text puts it, that Thomas, one of the twelve. In that disciple band, twelve in number, you have a variety of temperaments and personalities. And until the end of time Thomas in particular will always be tagged with a distinguishing characteristic -- you know it immediately -- he was called the Doubter, the skeptic...he was a pessimist.

When I look at this wood carving and see these twelve disciples with our blessed Lord, I am also reminded that when God sees fit to do something, He prefers to work through a human being. Presumably, God doesn't care to do things all by Himself. When God gave us the greatest of all His blessings, the Incarnation, God reached for Mary's son, for a carpenter's son, and came to us in the form of a human being who could even supper and die upon the cross. God prefers to work through people.

Now in the case of Jesus Christ, you're not forgetting -- of course you're not forgetting, that He had someone absolutely sinless, spotless, and unsullied by this world. But when God, using His preferred method, reaches for someone like you, someone like me, He takes us with all our frailty, with all our limitations, and that's something else that I remind myself when I look at this wood sculpture.....these disciples on either side of Jesus Christ, men whom He had called, men whom He had made -- but each with his limitation, each with his shortcoming. This is the nature of human flesh.

W. McIntosh McHigh, a distinguished Scottish preacher, once wrote a book in which he outlines for us the twelve disciples as he pictured them. The title for his book is a very important one. He calls his book "The Men Whom

Jesus Made" -- men who came to Him at the very beginning, with certain limitations. He never called them because they were perfect. The mark of a saint is never perfection; the mark of a saint is consecration, willingness to be used by God.

Now, one of the things that I keep saying to myself when I remember that Jesus chose these twelve men is that they were so unlike in personality and temperament. You might not be able to name the twelve disciples -- would you like that exercise right now?...you might be able to name three, four, five, maybe six -- can you name all twelve of them?....but that's not important. The important thing is what you already know. Not that you know their names -- the important thing is that you know that they were different in personality and temperament.

You know that in the disciple band there was one that was always quick to speak, always quick to make any kind of a promise, the highly impulsive Peter.....

....you also know that in the disciple band there was one, according to the Scriptures record, who seemed to be a bit more spiritually sensitive than the rest. He even has the title, "the disciple whom Jesus loved"....and the recorder of one of the Gospel records says that he was the one who was leaning on the breast of Jesus.....

....and I told you earlier, to be tagged until the end of time is that man Thomas, whose personality, whose temperament was that of a doubter, and a pessimist.

Now this is a fact that must be established clearly in our minds: there

is no such thing as the Christian type of personality, there is no such thing as the Christian type of temperament. I am not talking about basic character, I am talking about temperament and personality. There was a time in my life, and perhaps it reflects your experience as well, when I fervently believed that if a person was going to be a Christian, he had to be of the same stamp, as far as personality and temperament is concerned, as everybody else who became a Christian....and I had my own idea of what that personality and temperament should be! But I tell you, this is a mistake.

It is not a good thing to believe that every person who takes the name of Jesus Christ is automatically and arbitrarily going to be of the same stamp, as far as personality, as far as temperament are concerned. I have lived long enough to believe that a person may even have a gloomy disposition and still be called a Christian....not that I would like him to have a gloomy disposition. When I was reading a number of books in my college and seminary days, I was introduced to the man who was the Dean for St. Paul's Cathedral, and he was introduced to me in one of the pages of the book as "the gloomy Dean." And I thought to myself, how can this be? How can anyone be a Christian and be gloomy? I honestly believe that it's absolutely possible for a person to be a Christian and have moods when he is depressed, and still be a Christian! This is one of the most difficult things that you and I have to accept in our relationship with other people.

Let me lay bare my soul to you now, as a minister of the Gospel, as a Pastor, for more than a quarter of a century.....that every now and then church groups, people who mean so well, within small circles run into any

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kind of trouble when they discover that within their group there is a distinctive type person whose personality, whose temperament they cannot fully understand nor appreciate. And then they begin edging them out, ignoring them, just because they don't happen to be of the same stamp! -- as far as personality is concerned, as they are, or the kind of personality they happen to like. Listen carefully.....do you think for a single minute that Jesus Christ liked the type of personalities that made up that disciple band? Do you think for a single minute that, human as He was, that there were not times when He wished that they were entirely different than they were? Don't be shocked by this -- this is the Gospel record to prove the point! -- time and again He had to take them to task.....time and again, and I say it ever so reverently, He had to cut them down to size. And it wasn't a matter of their basic Christian commitment or character. It was a matter of their temperament and their personality.

So I am impressed by the fact that when I read these words, "Thomas, one of the twelve" -- small in number as that group, yet their variety was great. It may be possible for a person to be a Christian and still be glum, just as it's possible for a person to be Christian and to be constantly effervescent. It's the glory of the Christian faith that Jesus Christ takes us, with so great variety, and says, "I can use you....I can use you....I can use you."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, was distinctive because he was a pessimist, slow to believe, a man who would say, "Unless you can show me, I'm not so sure that I can go along with what you propose." Thomas was a doubter, and in company with all other doubters, whatever their reason for unbelief, they run the risk of making a grievous mistake. Remember how the text reads, "But

Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came."

...whenever you discover that a man has a shortcoming, this limitation always serves as a handicap. Invariably he's the worse because he has it. You may allow a man to have his limitation, but you are also in duty bound to be honest enough to name the handicap or the limitation. And that's precisely what happened to Thomas. Because he was a doubter, he became a loner. He held himself aloof. When the company of disciples had gathered together, pessimist that he was, he removed himself and he wasn't with them.

This is risky business. Risky business because Thomas missed something by not being within the disciple band. You remember how the Scriptures put it: Thomas not being with them when Jesus came, then when Jesus came He gave them a blessing the like of which He had never given before. He told them something that He had never told them before, something as terrific as all this - - "You shall be to the world as I have been to the world; as I forgive sins, you shall be able to forgive sins. As you do not forgive sins, I will not forgive sins." Then there was the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

...all this happened, and Thomas, the loner, the doubter, was not there.

Doubters, whatever their reason for unbelief, run the risk of making a grievous mistake. Thomas, worthy soul that he ever was, did not rise above this pit-fall. And the mistake they make in common? It's the tendency to separate themselves from the fellowship of the believers. A doubter can be a 'loner,' and it's risky business to with-draw especially since God allows for certain blessings to be had only from within the fellowship of those who prize His name.

There was a wise old Scottish preacher who deliberately went to the home

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of one of his parishioners when he found out that he had no longer been coming to church and being a part of the body of believers in his parish. He wasn't quite sure just why the old gentleman decided to separate himself. But the good old dominie knew one thing, that as long as he separated himself from the body of believers, he was denying himself certain blessings, because this is one reason why Jesus Christ allows the church - - there are certain things that God gives within the company of believers that we do not get at any other time or in any other way.

The old dominie knew this was true for this chap who had separated himself, so he went to pay him a visit. And as he sat there in the parlor with him in front of the open hearth, he spoke to him, and then it was made plain to him that the old gentleman seemed to enjoy separating himself from the body of Christians. There was a significant silence, and then the preacher, wise with the years, went over to the fire, and taking the tongs he simply took two coals from the body of coals, and then put them down in the front of the hearth by themselves, and simply observed, "How long do you think these two coals can burn by themselves, once they have been separated from the body of the fire?"

...of course the old gentleman got the point. The fire of faith needs to be kindled constantly, as we keep ourselves within the body of believers. And this was the mistake that Thomas made with his limitation.

But now I must ask you - - wouldn't you have reacted as some of us would have reacted to Thomas if he was separated from the body of believers? Wouldn't you have said, "Thomas, why don't you come with us. We need the encouragement of your presence - - Thomas, come with us, you might begin to see

things as we see them." I'm not so sure that I would have been patient with Thomas. I think I would have said some scornful things about him....

....what kind of a disciple are you? - - half-hearted,
commit yourself only to certain things, and then
walk by yourself? Thomas, don't make a fool of
yourself....

....and who knows, maybe I would have marked him off the books.

How does our Lord deal with people like that? Jesus came back, knowing that Thomas ultimately would return, and when Thomas was there Jesus dealt with him very patiently and said, "All right, Thomas, here I am.....
...you've said what was necessary for proof - - come, Thomas". And when Jesus spoke to him like that, Thomas gave the greatest of all declarations of Christian faith - - "My Lord and my God!"

I have lived long enough never to write off a doubter. There are some who say that the greatest doubters have turned into the greatest believers, if only we're willing to be patient with the mistakes that they make as they doubt. It was a father in this congregation who told me, "Pastor, you have no idea of the anguish that I experience when I patiently stand by and see my sons making all the mistakes that I made in my youth, simply because when I tell him what to do, he doubts my word." It required the utmost of patience to stand by while doubters have their field-day and make their mistakes. But Jesus dealing patiently with Thomas, Thomas comes back, and there are those who tell us that none was stronger in his faith than Thomas.

I must also tell you this before I turn my back on this pulpit this morning. Mr. DeLong is also suggesting for us a very excellent and a very

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chaste use of symbolism in our altar area. He thinks we ought to have symbols of the twelve apostles, very proper, and when he showed me the original design, and I looked at the one for Thomas, I shook my head and said, "I do not like it." His sixty years with working with pastors and churches has taught him a great deal, and very patiently he said, "But you don't understand, Pastor. Let me tell you what the symbol for Thomas means. Now the symbol for Thomas, and each of the disciples has his own symbol, the symbol for Thomas is a carpenter's square, and against it a spear - - "

...and when Mr. DeLong in his eighties dealt patiently
with me he said,

" - - you ought to know it, you were in India. Tradition has it that Thomas walked all the way from the Holy Land to India and was the first person to talk about Jesus Christ to that land. While he was there he built with his own hands a church - - he was the carpenter among the twelve disciples."

"And that spear?" I said.

And he said, "You ought to know that, too. He remained so firm in the faith, that rather than give up belief in Jesus Christ the enemies of the Cross drove a spear through his heart."

A man called Thomas. Once a doubter, but God had a place for him.

* * *

"GOOD SHEPHERD"

The sermon bearing the title "Good Shepherd" is based upon the Gospel for the day; and the text, the 11th verse of the 10th chapter of John:

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

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I would not have you forget for a single Sunday that this year, beginning last September and continuing until June of this year, the sermons are based upon passages from the fourth Gospel. I would also have you remember that when the series began, reference was made to a legend -- you dare not forget now, it's a legend, and the legend puts it this way, that not long after the death of Jesus certain of the disciples came to John and said, "John, we know the place that you had in the life of our Master. Some of us go on referring to you as 'the beloved disciple.' Ever so often when He was about to go anywhere, before He would go He'd look around for you. He seemed always to want you to be in His company. Oh, it was occasionally Peter and John and James, but we've walked long enough with you, John, to believe that you have a kind of spiritual sensitivity that the rest of us have never known. John, this is what we want you to do... we want to see Jesus through your eyes. We want your record of His life and of His teachings."

The legend also has it that John said, "All right, if this is to be done, then we must know from God that it's the thing to be done. You come, then, with me for three days and for three nights, and we will pray. And we'll wait upon the leading of the Lord. And if He puts it into our hearts

that this is it, and if I know it without any reservation, then I will do it."

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It's a legend, I tell you, but the truth of the legend remains and must be respected, there are those who have beatific qualities. That means they are blessed with a spiritual sensitivity that some of us do not have. And therefore we ought to turn to them and know the benefit of what may come to us through them. John was such a person. So John gives us his Gospel.

It's quite different from the rest of the Gospels, when you begin to see Jesus through his eyes. Now, when a person knows another person very well, a very unusual thing happens. Now, listen very carefully, and don't make too much of it in this precise situation....when one person gets to know another person very well sometimes that person knows the other person better than that person knows himself! That's why a woman who has lived with a man for thirty years can say to her husband, "Why, I know you better than you know yourself." It's possible. And then sometimes when this occurs, we are able to appreciate that person as that person may or may not see himself.

Now, going back to the John/Jesus situation. John not only gives us in the fourth Gospel the record and the life and teachings of Jesus as John knew Him -- but get ready now for something startling -- John even makes bold to give us an insight into the life of Jesus Christ as presumably Jesus himself interpreted His own role; and that's why in John's Gospel you get what you don't get anywhere else: the I AM passages -- the self-portraits of Jesus.

It's John who has us hearing the words of Jesus in this regard....

"I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life"

"I AM the Bread of Life"

"I AM the Resurrection and the Life"

"I AM the Door"

" I AM the Good Shepherd"

....this is why some of us prize this fourth Gospel, because we get insights into the life of Jesus Christ that otherwise we might not have.

Now this is what you must understand when you come to today's Gospel lesson. It's Jesus Christ giving us an insight into His own life as He knew himself to be. And this is always a great moment in any person's life, when he can say, "This is what I know myself to be," or to be able to say, "This is what I know I was meant to be in your life." I am inclined to think it's the first sign of maturation when a person really begins to know himself. I have lived long enough to know that some people never master this. They never quite find out who they are, who they were meant to become, what their rightful role in life is.

Do you know that I honestly believe that this is one reason why people come to church. I honestly believe that some of us come to church because this is one place where, if only momentarily, we get a glimpse of what in the sight of God we actually are, and furthermore, blessed and happy thought! what we can become. Of all the religions, you see, Christianity does have its practical aspects, it does not ignore the fact that you happen to be what you are, and is bold to brand you for what you are. You know by this time, as I've lived and walked with you for ten years, that I embrace the

Christian religion if for no other reason than this, oddly as I put it, because I'm in love with God! I can't help but respond to Him, and I would be a Christian for that reason, no matter how faltering my step.

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But there's another reason why I embrace the Christian religion....it's so very, very practical -- practical enough to deal with me as I am, and to let me see myself as I am, and to see myself as I was meant to become, that I might rise into the full maturity of manhood in Jesus Christ. This is the struggle that many of us have, trying to find out who we are. That's why people hie themselves off to the psychiatrist -- perhaps in just the way he skillfully lets them talk, they may catch something in the echo of their own voices, and then to be caught up by it, and to say to themselves, "Did I say that?" -- did I think that?"

...and then if he's capable enough, after the session is over, or the series of sessions, to let us see these series of interviews as a kind of reflection.

Jesus stood up one day and said, "I am the Good Shepherd." He evaluated himself. He had this measure of self-identification, and all without a battery of tests! -- all without a series of interviews, all without the benefit of a series of personal conferences, important, as necessary as they may be. Jesus Christ stood up and said, "This is what I know myself to be. This, under God, I was meant to be for you." I honestly believe that there ought to come a moment in any man's life when, under God, he ought to be able to say, "This is what I know myself to be."

Now when Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," He used imagery that meant a great deal to the people who heard Him say it. Palestinian, pastoral, rural

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folk that they were, they knew the value of a single lamb, they knew the value of a single sheep. It was the animal of sacrifice. By it their table was spread, by it they had clothing for their backs. Every single sheep was so prized that when a shepherd was given the responsibility to watch over the flock, he was told that he must do it even at the risk of his life. Not only because it was his job, but these shepherds gained an attachment for their responsibility. Each sheep, eventually, for the good shepherd, took on its own personality, and there was an element of trust and response that those who have traveled in the Holy Land and have taken time to observe it, tell us that there could be four or five different herds of sheep gathered together in one area, and then a shepherd would come forth, and he'd call to each of the sheep in his flock.....and only the sheep that knew his voice would flock to him, so great was this relationship.

It meant so much to those people in Palestine that their favorite king was referred to as the Shepherd King -- David the shepherd lad who became king. And they loved him because they honestly believed that there was this spillover, this carry-over, in his relationship to them as the kind of person he was in relationship even to dumb animals, a high regard for them in their condition.

When Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd" - I tell you it's the love-liest thing that He ever said about himself. That reference of His about being the Good Shepherd leaves absolutely nothing to be desired. This is, you see, not only what we want most from God, it is also what we need most: shepherding love. We have our moments when we see ourselves as sheep who are stupid, who are straying, who are starving. Then we remember His words, "I

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am the Good Shepherd." That means it is no less than God who forgives us when we sin, it is no less than God who goes looking after us when we stray, it is no less than God who lifts us up when we fall, it is no less than God who protects us when the Evil One assails us....it is no less than God who sacrifices himself that we should be saved.

One of the things I always wanted most when I went to the Holy Land was to see some kind of a protective shelter that was called a sheep-fold. And among the types that they have even to this day, the opening in a cave; there's no door. When the shepherd brings his sheep in at the end of the day, that they might have protection and shelter, he stands and he counts them.... 97....98....99..... He did have 100. There's one that's missing. And when somehow he can guarantee that these 90 and 9 will be protected, he himself goes out looking for the one that's lost....without any benefit of flashlight, without any benefit of a portable generating unit. He goes out into the thick of the night, against the prowling wolves, where at any time he might slip and fall and go to his own death - - so great is his concern.

Jesus Christ says it's no less than God who feels that way about us!

There was a man who wrote a book, or an essay I should say, on "Why I No Longer Go To Church." What he had to say is an indictment against the Christian faith, or rather I should say, those who practice it, and those who worship Jesus Christ. He said, "It so happened in the church where I'd go Sunday after Sunday, I suddenly discovered that I wasn't getting what I know the Church really had a right to proclaim, as what only the Church could proclaim. I was getting the faint echoes of other men's minds. And I have a hunger for what God himself thinks of himself....not so much what man thinks

about God.¹¹

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You see, this is the heresy of our day. We've raised up a breed who are parading hither and yon what they think about God, as though that were the final word! The important thing is what God thinks of himself, how God wants you and me to think of Him.

God wants us to see Him as the Good Shepherd, who cares for us, who loves us.....now what you won't care to hear -- who wants to control your life! For a day's work for a shepherd was always properly controlling his sheep. They were the better because of it. We are the rebellious ones, we are the defiant ones. But even in the sight of God there are blessings that come only to those who are controlled by His love. This is what we must declare, this is the message of redeeming grace: the shepherding love of God.

In these ten years you've heard me every now and then bring a personality into my sermon, and by this time certain names are no longer strangers to you. Take the name of Dr. Harvey D. Hoover. I met him first in the shadow of Nawakwa, and he guided me, as a shepherd to my soul, through college, seminary, then even after I became your Pastor, for a year or so until he died, I went to him as my confidante. I remember once in the seminary class he told us, he was serving as an interim pastor in a metropolitan parish. One day somebody came in all bewildered and said, "Pastor, would you please conduct a funeral service for one in our family? Two other pastors have refused, and I suppose, Pastor, they had their reasons, because we're not very good people. When you see where we live, you'll see the kind of environment that surrounds us".....a kind of hell's kitchen. But God gave Harvey Hoover a heart as big

as God can give to any man. And off he went to conduct the service.

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But he said, "It wasn't as though I were ~~at~~ conscience-stricken. I said to myself, what, as a minister of Jesus Christ, should I say?" Tempted as you might have been, He did not go to preach the wrath of God, he did not go to talk about Hell.....Hell -- they lived in it! It was all around them. But in the one chance that he had to minister to those people, he talked about the shepherding love of God....God who would never give them up....God who would seek after them when they strayed....God who would comfort them when they were sorrowful. Don't get me wrong -- the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a wholly righteous God, who loves us. He holds us responsible for what we deliberately do in defiance. Knowing our frail limitations, He patiently deals with us. He loves the sinner, but He hates your sin. You can say it that way.

When Winifred and I went to the outskirts of Hong Kong we visited a very fascinating colony that's staffed by Buddhists that came from China. They have a studio. Some of them have become Christian. They're skilled artists, and they interpret religious truths on porcelain. In the parsonage we have a plate that we've brought back. It's the interpretation of the Good Shepherd -- a strange interpretation of the Good Shepherd....he has an infuriated look upon His face.....He has a stick in His hands that's threatening....He's chasing off a wolf that's about to attack a lamb! This is the kind of Good Shepherd that He is! But remember this: infuriated as He is, He still has an abiding concern for that lamb! He will not give it up, even though it may have strayed away.

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In Dr. Zhivago, in the screen interpretation, the story begins and ends with the half-brother of Zhivago trying to find his niece, the real daughter of his half-brother. And as he looks over the conscriptees, working in the labor camp, they bring this very charming girl. She is confused, of course, but he insists upon an interrogation, and always pressing for this question: How did you become lost?....how did you become lost?

Now the story is that his half-brother, her real father, allowed her to be taken away that she might have life, she might be guaranteed a measure of freedom, even before she was born. But the evil man, who was with her mother, in the time of the fire and the testing, failed to discharge a man's obligation to a child.....and she replies in this very telling way:

"How did I become lost?....how did I become lost?

...He let go my hand."

God who is our Heavenly Father.....Jesus Christ who is the Good Shepherd, is always holding our hand. He won't let go. Don't you let go of His.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CHRISTIAN JOY"

Ever since last September at this particular time on a Sunday morning we've been turning to some page in the fourth Gospel to find a Scriptural setting for a sermon. Today's sermon bears the title "Christian Joy" and it is based upon the Gospel for the day, the text being the 22nd verse of the 16th chapter of John:

"And ye now therefore have sorrow; but
I will see you again, and your heart
shall rejoice, and your joy no man
taketh from you."

If I were to speak quite hypothetically to you this morning, and tell you that within the next six weeks or two months a brand new religious group would form a colony here in Montgomery County, your curiosity would be aroused. In all likelihood you would look for them, and when you would encounter them you'd try to gain the kind of impression that you feel they are actually giving you.....

...what kind of people are these folks who now are branded
a new religious colony?

....what do they think about life, what do they think
about one another?

.....what do they think about God?

.....some of these things it might take a bit of doing until you finally detected the right answer to your question.

But as to the impression that you would get as to their personality, and whatever characteristic traits you would easily recognize, well that might be an entirely different story. And one of the things that you might ask your-

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self after you'd seen them : are they a happy people -- are they joyous? When Dr. Carlson and I were winging our way from Cairo to Bombay we suddenly discovered on the flight with us two Danish gentlemen. They were scheduled to appear at an international conference dealing with the control of atomic energy. And Dr. Carlson said to me, "I am certain they're Danish." And he said, "Raymond, do you know that there are two kinds of Danes? - - there are the sad Danes, the unhappy ones.....and then there are the glad Danes, the happy ones." He said, "It won't take long until we'll find out what kind they are." As you and I deal with any group of people, it doesn't take long until we discover whether or not they're joyful or zestful, or unhappy people.

From the very beginning people, Christians were meant to be happy people, from the very beginning Christians were meant to be joyful. It's perfectly proper for a Christian to laugh most heartily. Look out for any Christian who is sad and gloomy, who goes through life with a dourful expression. Watch that man. If I were to ask, which of two kinds of people do you think you could trust easier? - - I think I'd sooner trust a happy man than a sad and dourful soul.

Now you may make of that whatever you wish, but I do tell you on good authority, that when our Lord was here on earth one of the last things that He talked about to a band of disciples whom He had loved dearly, He was talking to them about joy, and He wanted them to know that they were intended to be a happy people. With Calvary only a matter of days away, Jesus was talking, of all things, to that little company about joy.

I'll grant you, Christians haven't always remembered it. Permit me, won't you, to share this with you. It comes out of the life and spirit of the man who was the first Pastor of this congregation. I knew him in seminary

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days. And when I mention now the name of the Rev. Fred Eckert, some of you at once can hear his hearty laughter. He's in love with life, and truly zestful. The first time I heard him in Chapel he used an illustration that he enjoyed using ever so often when he went out to speak -- as though he wanted to broadcast to the whole world that every Christian should have a smile upon his face, and that it's pleasing in God's sight that people should enjoy life. This was his illustration....

....there was a New England preacher, oh, more than a hundred years ago of course, who had a two-church charge. He preached at one early in the morning, and then later in the day he had this appointment elsewhere. The first congregation was near where he lived, and when he had finished preaching, he got ready to go on to his next appointment....only to discover that his horse was ill. How, now, could he get to his next appointment?being an ingenious chap, he remembered there was the river. It was a winter's morning, and the river was frozen over. This man of God was constrained to preach the Word. He honestly believed that God had given him a message that had to be declared that day, and that the second congregation needed to hear it as much as the first congregation. And being eager to keep his appointment in the second congregation, he very cleverly did what would come to him as a very natural thing -- the river being frozen over, he put on his skates and went skating down the riveron a Sabbath morning.

When he arrived at the second congregation, there were the people out looking for the preacher -- he was a little bit late --

....and rather than greet him with open arms, the deacons

had already assembled, and they took him to task -- "Skating on the Sabbath!"

(Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not about to build up a case for skating on the Sabbath -- don't miss the point of what I'm trying to make plain to you)

...they put him on the defensive -- "Why is this, that we find you skating on the Sabbath?"

And then he told them forthright that he felt that the Lord had given him a message to declare, and he wanted to keep his appointment.

...it looked as though he had won his point, until one dourful deacon (and I've met some people who could take his part) came to him and stuck his finger in his face and said, in a question that was never meant to be humorous, not then nor now as I relate it to you...

"Tell me, Preacher, did ye enjoy the skating?"

...as though he had no right to enjoy in this world, not only on a Sabbath day, but on any day!

There are Christians like that! And I think they're quite unworthy of the name Christian. God made us to enjoy this world. Even in the sad and miserable days in which the psalmist existed and endured life, you'll even find the psalmist talking about rejoicing in the Lord. Again and ever so often you find Jesus Christ talking about joy -- "And your joy will be full" -- "I will see you again, and the joy that I give you no man can take away." And do you know what? There were people who found fault with Jesus Christ! And some of the people who found fault with Jesus when He was here, it was because He was enjoying life, and He went and fellowshiped with people who knew what it was to make merry.

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If you had the good fortune to do any kind of traveling at all, you come back with the impression that people the world over are pretty much the same. The cultures may vary, and you may go from poverty to riches, you may go from a highly backward nation to a highly forward-looking people -- progressive to the nth degree, and yet no matter where you may go, if you have ears to hear, you'll find people making merry, children laughing in the marketplace, men enjoying and rejoicing in the good crop that they gathered in from the field.....and on a wedding day, the merriment that's associated with it. Surely this must make God smile.

Now Jesus was talking about joy, one of the last things that He talked about when He left His disciples. Of course the subject of sorrow was also being discussed. In fact, He began this specific part of the conversation by dealing with their grief. But He moved ever so quickly on to the happier, the more blessed turn of events. You see, it is a thing to be remembered, whatever else we may say about the Christian life, it must always be said that it never ends in sorrowful tears. Joy is a characteristic that belongs to the Christian.

You know full well, a pastor is always trying to keep his finger on the pulsebeat of his people, and sometimes this is done for him as he gathers the impression that they make on strangers who come. Sometimes a pastor gets a good image of his people as he sees them through the eyes of someone who has come as a visitor. This is why it delights me immeasurably when folks come and visit Saint Luke Church, and take away, as so many will, the kind of impression that Dr. Elizabeth Miller took with her -- you know, she's the physician grandmother who for ten years has been practicing, with her husband, in Nepal. She was here for two days as a guest of the congregation, speaking

at the two Mother-Daughter Banquets, and then sharing in a very meaningful retreat session at Bethany. She got to meet a number of you, casually, in connection with the banquet, most certainly in depth at the retreat session at Bethany, and then a few of you, perhaps, in the evening after the banquet was over.

When we stood with her at the bus terminal on Thursday morning -- you're entitled to know what she said....."It's been a joy to be with the people of Saint Luke congregation -- you seem to be so happy in the Lord's work".....a splendid thing to be said about you.

And one of the things that I thoroughly enjoy as being the Pastor of this church is the way young people zestfully react to what's being offered here. Oh, every now and then we've got to remind them on Thursday that they don't run through the corridors, we have to quiet them sometimes when they forget that this is not a multiple-purpose room, that this is the Nave. But by and large, just to know that they're zestful when they think about church, and can be in this building and laugh heartily.....what a terrible thing if we should frown upon young people, who could not laugh.

When I became forty I began to appreciate what I did not appreciate before, that people had told me that 'life begins at forty.' I didn't quite understand what they meant by that expression. I was forty when I came to you, and quite unashamedly I tell you, then I began to realize what being forty meant. Having reached that age, it occurred to me that to all intents and purposes, I had already lived longer than I might have yet to live. And this thought in itself is a sobering thing. Then also, at forty, having spent at least fifteen years in the ministry, I had been exposed to a number of the common things that happen in life....as a minister of the Gospel I had been called into homes where

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someone had been taken by a heart attack, fatally.....and just like that, the whole picture changes. At forty I had walked enough with some of my people that I knew what happens when they get the report from the surgeon, and it's not good.....the surgeon says to the father, the mother, the wife or the husband, "God alone knows, but on the basis of my experience, it could be two weeks, it could be two months." This does something to a person, and then you see that there's another side of life. In the impressionable years of adolescence we're always thinking that life is always going to go on, and there will always be a spring in the step. We can't possibly appreciate what it is when people mourn when we're young.

On Saturday, as I'll be doing on any number of Saturdays now, I'll be reading the marriage service -- presumably for a couple the happiest day in their life. And even the Church sees fit to give a realistic reading in the marriage service that's being conducted. How does it go?

" - - for richer.....for poorer

" - - in health.....and in sickness

" - - for better.....or worse - - "

...always the possibility of joy being turned into sorrow.

Can one, then, believe as a Christian, that there is a kind of joy that remains, that can never be taken away? This, precisely, was the kind of thing that Jesus Christ was talking about, to a handful of disciples who were sorrowful, when He was deliberately painting for them a picture that to all intents and purposes at that moment didn't seem very promising and very pleasant. And it seemed to them as though He was talking out of both sides of His mouth at the same time

" - - a little while this way - - a little while that way

and then as over against that I tell you you can always
have joy in your heart - - "

...no wonder they had the puzzled look on their faces and came to Him, hoping that He would say to them exactly what He was trying to say, in a way that they would understand it.

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Please understand what I am telling you now.....she sings in the 8:30 choir. She's in part of the overflow section that's located about the second or third seat from the pulpit. She's a precious adorable tyke. I'm quite sure the Choirmaster and Organist has told them that they are to maintain themselves with complete decorum at all times, especially when you process and especially when you go out.....but now the service is over. We've endeavored to conduct it with the utmost of dignity...the sermon has been preached, hopefully as a "Thus saith the Lord" -- commanding a sober reaction.....and now with the benediction having been pronounced and the recessional hymn being sung....

....when I reach this chancel step, almost
Sunday after Sunday she is at the edge of her pew, and
she waits there almost momentarily to catch my eye,
and then she beams....and on occasion she has been
known to wink!

...I tell you quite honestly, I've never found it in my heart to reprimand her, and I've never had the slightest inclination to ignore her. But in sober moments of reflection I say to myself, what a glad and a good thing that a youngster in God's House, with all the atmosphere of reverence that we try to create, would still have a smile on her face.

In all the years that lie ahead for that youngster, all the onslaught

of life will try to take that smile away. But I pray God for her, that down deep in her heart there will remain a joy, a joy because she's been baptized in Jesus' name, joy because next year she'll kneel at the altar and claim a Master who will never leave her, who will never forsake her.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"TO HIS OWN HOME"

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On this second Sunday in May, which is increasingly being observed as the Festival of the Christian Home, the sermon bears the title, "To His Own Home"; and the text, we turn again, as we've been doing now for some weeks and months, to pages in the Gospel according to John. Today it's the 19th chapter, the 26th, the 27th verses:

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!
Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

Tell me, my friend, suppose you were given the assignment to be a biographer -- it would be your responsibility to reduce to writing the record and the impression of a single life. Where, now, would you begin?

I think I would discourage you from beginning first off with the circumstances of a man's birth; but rather, I would say, why not study him at the very beginning, in his prime? Take a good long look at him when he was in the fulness of all the qualities that God bestowed upon him; and when having come into his own, he was able to call all of these gifts and these talents into play.....let me see him first in this great moment, this great period of his life.....let me deal first with him in his maturity, or, if at all possible, he has a measure of strength up to his last moment, and there has not been the deteriorating process over a long period of years, but if he goes out in a blaze of glory.....then let me begin with him at that point.

I think I can tell you this on good authority. When the early church

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began telling the story of the life of Jesus Christ, when their hearts' desire was to have him appeal to people as their Master and their Saviour, they did not first begin with an angel song, and a star shining in the night - - they did not first begin with a maiden pure - - they did not first say, "Let me tell you about a man names Joseph". But rather they dealt with the final chapter in His life, the last three years in His life. They said, "This is the One of whom we will speak, and as He made His impact upon me, so He may make His appeal to you."

That's why on this day I give more than ordinary attention to this text, a text that constitutes the words spoken by our Blessed Lord in the last moments of His life. What, now, is of primary concern to Him, in the fulness of His life? You and I have a way of giving special attention to people who speak to us, and then we have a way of remembering them as the last words that we heard them speak. According to the text, it's Calvary. There isn't much time left. What, now, is important to God, against the overwhelming aspects of the terror of Crucifixion? What is it that God sees fit to bring to our attention?

God in Christ looks down from the cross and sees a widowed woman, a widowed woman who has had five sons and two daughters.....and God in Christ establishes again the principle which has always been in the mind of God: that there are certain basic needs to be met that can be met only within the confines of a family relationship, certain basic needs that can be met only within the home circle.

It was something more than the discharge of duty by the eldest son, I tell you.....it was good Jewish tradition that the eldest son should be

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the one responsible for the welfare of his parents, and so Jesus Christ had been brought up - - but it was something even more than that. See it, then, for exactly what it was, and sublimely so. It all took place in the arena of the greater battle, in the very midst of Calvary's terrible torture: Jesus hanging on the Cross sends Mary home with John. The needs of those who are nearest and dearest to us must always be seen as a sacred obligation. This is precisely what Jesus Christ is spelling out.

Mary from this moment on has certain needs that He himself will not be able to meet, but these needs must be met. He who is no longer her son must see that a son cares for her - - "John, be to her as a son....Mary, be to him as a mother - - "that these needs shall be met. So God speaks to us!

When God made us, God made us as social creatures. That means we come into our fulfillment only as we have the result of the interplay of personality forces that are at work upon us. It can be said, I think, that most of us are the accumulation, in a certain sense, of the interplay of the personalities with whom we associate. This is why, very, very properly, a good and faithful parent will have a concern as to the type of person with whom the adolescent associates, particularly in these impressionable years. We have a way of reflecting those with whom we walk, with whom we talk. Do you know, there's a school of thought that maintains that let two people live together even for a long period of time, and they not only will begin to think alike, to talk alike - - they may even look alike! This is one reason why a wife may speak with some degree of justification to her husband when she discovers the kind of cronies that he has, or why a husband may be exercised when he discovers the kind of woman with whom his wife will

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spend her free time. We do have a way of thinking like the people with whom we associate. It is this very delicate thing called the interplay of personality forces. There is always the cross-fertilization of mind and spirit. So God made us as social creatures, hopefully that when this does occur, it might be for our good.

This is why when God made us He made the solitary to be part of the family relationship. God did not make us as isolated humans. In the mind and the plan of God, even from the very beginning, there is the family; and it has its justification, if for no other reason, surely then this, that within it we grow, and develop, because of interaction.

Much is being said in this day and age of the deterioration of the home, of the deterioration of the family relationship. I don't know exactly what that means. Perhaps it does mean this - - that the home no longer has the influence that it once had, and that this should be a lamentable thing for society. Therefore, it becomes us who take the name of Christ, to remember that God is always putting His divine imprimatur upon the family. One of the last things that He ever said to a single human being was this: a relationship between a man and a woman to be considered a family relationship.

What are these needs that must be met within the family circle, and if perchance they're not met there, they may not be met anywhere else? Well, as God planned it, there are certain basic physical needs that have to be met within the family circle. In Catechetical Class when we are discussing the Lord's Prayer, one of the first questions we ask when we come to that section.....Jesus taught us to call God Father - - what do you think He

meant by that? Why don't we begin at the very beginning, we say to the teenager.....what does a father do? Interestingly enough, ever so often the youngster will say, "Why, he provides for us." That's the level at which they begin.....

...the table is spread, you see, money is provided

.....there's home and there's shelter

.....their first thought is their physical needs. There are certain basic physical needs that are met within the family, and if they're not met there, by whom, then, will they be met?

There are also needs other than physical that have to be met. There are spiritual needs. The set of the soul is determined early in life.

Ask any pastor who has the good fortune to shepherd a congregation over a period of years.....when he reaches the place where he finds himself confirming those whom he had baptized, marrying those whom he had confirmed, baptizing the children of those whom he had baptized.....when he gets to know his people so well, he discovers eventually in ever so many cases that the children begin to reflect the attitudes that had been set before them within the family circle.

Attitudes are contagious. This is one reason why I myself am always disturbed by people who are negative in their thinking. Life itself has a way of disturbing us and unsettling us, let alone having people go through life always with a negative attitude. And then, too, for that to be passed on from one generation to another! It's bad enough that the father and the mother should be cursed by it, let alone to pass this thing on to the next generation. It can be so damaging and so crippling. It's a cancer of the

heart, you see, that eats out, to be negative, to be cynical. We have a way, you see, of reflecting the kinds of things to which we have been exposed.

It's in the home where a youngster is caught up in the interplay of attitudes as well as conversation. Wasn't it on the back cover of the LUTHERAN WOMEN magazine that I read something like this, that God has seen fit to speak through people just by their presence, that there are those who influence us, not so much sometimes by what they say but by their very bearing, by their very attitude. It's within the confines of the family circle, you see, that we are exposed, in the impressionable years of life, to attitudes.

I know that God will hold us responsible as a church for what we do with those who are entrusted to our keeping. I also know that God holds us responsible for what we do as parents to those who are entrusted to our keeping within the family circle. For in the mind of God there are needs that must be met within the family circle, and if they are not met there, then we thwart and frustrate even the very plan of God. I used to say, tell me how a man treats his wife, and I can tell you how that man's son will look upon the girl that he will marry. That's how important the attitudes within the family circle can be.

Ever so often when I find myself engaged in counseling, and the man and woman have reached an impasse and they want to divorce each other...and maybe it could be better in some cases where they would be separated -- if there were only two adults involved.....but within the family relationship there is such a thing as responsibility for children. What will this mean to the children, if you, the father and the mother, do not fulfill the needs

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that are to be met within the family circle, who will? You've heard it said when a child is baptized at this font, the words that can be properly spoken: "God smiles upon us broadly when He places into our lives and into our love the soul of a child; and when God does this, He gives us no greater responsibility than what we owe to the soul of a child." Jesus Christ, looking down from the Cross upon a widowed woman, recognizes a duty, divinely thrust upon man. But there is a need that can be met only within the confines of a family relationship.

I have lived long enough and have been parent long enough to know that it's an awesome thing to have this responsibility, and then to have reached the age where you stand by, and the period of your influence and the period of your meeting that need may no longer exist. Then you have to deal with only the evidence of what you've endeavored to do. Maybe God will not hold me primarily responsible for the outcome -- you can never quite predict the outcome when you deal with people.....but God does hold the individual responsible, and the manner by which he has discharged the duty, and this we must never forget.

I want to share with you in closing a very simple story, a very lovely story. Don't try to make it stand on all fours; but maybe the prosaic will give way now to the poetic in your lives, and you'll see it for what it's worth on that score. It is a story that comes to us about King Richard of England, who was taken captive, removed to Germany, and held there as a prisoner. His beloved subjects wondered where he was. They were greatly disturbed and unsettled, that he should be taken away.....none more so, however, than his minstrel, who had been his confidante in life. They had done

so much together -- they even composed a song together, a song that they alone knew. No one else in this whole wide world knew the song that they themselves had composed.

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The minstrel said to himself, somewhere in this world is my king. I must find him. So he left England, crossed the channel, went from country to country until he came to Germany.....and then as fate would have it, he found himself in a German prison. He began to sing as he went from one place to another, he began to sing the song that he and the king alone knew.

And then one day as he sang the first stanza, echoing from the corridors came back the second stanza -- the second stanza to be sung only by the person who knew it! Can this be so, he said, and he sang the third stanzaand the king came back with the fourth stanza. He had found his king!

I say to you, within the confines of the family circle, we are composing certain songs of the spirit, certain songs of the soul, that our children alone hear us sing. It could be that life will be cruel for them, it could be that life, poetically speaking, will have a way of making them captive. If they are ever to be found, it might be that one day they will hear again the song of the soul that belongs to us, and to them.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NEW WAY TO GOD'S HEART"

The sermon bearing the title, "New Way To God's Heart" is based upon the Gospel for the day; and the text, it's the 16th chapter of John, the 29th and the 30th verses:

"His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.

Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God."

One need not feel he is being disrespectful in admitting that from a purely human point of view Jesus remains a highly contradictory figure. Even a casual reading of the Gospel record will indicate how when He was here on earth He was both loved and hated. He seemed to be at the same time both so very, very human, and yet so sublimely divine. There were times when He would speak, that people could say, "We understand exactly what He's saying." There were other times when they would have to admit that they hadn't the slightest idea what He was talking about.

This kind of thing plagued Jesus all the days of His years here on earth. He seemed always trying to gain ground with the disciple band, always trying to win their favor. One uses that expression when you remember that what He tried to do, very bluntly speaking, was to gain their confidence, and to have them believe that He could be trusted.

Tell me quite honestly, suppose you were to do this kind of spiritual exercise, and I commend it to you heartily - - that every now and then you try to look at yourself from God's point of view. What would you say is

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God's greater problem as far as you and I are concerned?.....no matter how you may answer that question, you may have to say that God's greater problem with you is always getting us to believe Him, getting us to trust Him, getting us to accept Him.

He spent three years with the disciple band. He even had within His disciple band a group of the inner circle -- Peter, James, John. The entire group of twelve knew the benefit of these three years of discipleship. The inner circle gained insight and perception that the others perhaps might not have received. Yet after three years.....you know the outcome: Jesus Christ ends with a cross on His shoulder....

....and even from among the inner circle there is one who would deny Him.....even from among the twelve there is one who betrayed.....and the entire lot forsook Him.

What this must have done to Jesus Christ, from a purely human point of view. What, now, might He have said? Was it worth it? All this effort that God himself makes in identifying himself with poor miserable man, the sinner -- does man deserve to be loved? Should God stoop to man's level if in the end this is what might happen?

Yet despite the knowledge of all of this, when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, with steadfast devotion He set himself to accomplish the thing that He knew had to be done. He did what He knew had to be done whether they understood it or not. He said what had to be said, whether it made sense to them or not. It has to be this way. Eventually a man who must be true to the thing that claims him must chart his course and persist.....trusting. The time will come when there will be those who will say, 'Now we understand...now

we believe.....now we trust you."

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It was our Blessed Lord, who just as He was about to become a teenager, was so very much aware of this when He said to those who came looking for Him, "Why, don't you know I must be about my Father's business?" And one of the last wonderful glimpses that we have of Him on His knees -- "It must be Your will." So He gave himself to it completely, whether people would understand or whether they wouldn't understand, yet with the fervant hope that some day there might be those, limited in number as they would be, who would say, "Yes, we believe.....Yes, we trust you....Yes, now we understand what you've been trying to say."

It's a wonderful thing to come upon this passage in John's Gospel and its 16th chapter. It's a very rare moment, and one of the last contacts that Jesus had with His disciples. They had been taking Him to task that He wasn't speaking plainly enough. How proud people can become sometimes when they can take a person to task and say, "But you're not relating to us, you're not getting through!" There may come a time when a man may be guilty of being unable to communicate, and the fault will not be with him! It may be because he has a vantage-point that other folks don't have....it may be that he has prior knowledge which is yet to be theirs.....it may be that God has spoken to him, what God will speak to them only later on. So Jesus Christ is not about to give himself to complete distraction because every now and then they come and say to Him, "We don't know what you're talking about, and we can't quite understand why you've done what you have done the way you've done it." Basic integrity and full commitment calls for devotion to the thing that under God must be said.

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But a warm-souled moment happened, when, as you may remember the text for this sermon, they came to Him and said, "Now we understand -- now you are speaking plainly -- now we can believe the things of God because we believe you." And beloved, there comes the moment when this thing has to be experienced. There comes the moment when you must look upon the person who is chosen as your leader.....

....this may be within the confines of the family circle
....it may be the thing that you have to say about the
foreman, the president, the general manager
.....it may be the thing that you may have to say about
those whom you've chosen to represent you
.....it may be the thing that some day you may have to
say about your Pastor, and the relationship
between the congregation and the spiritual leader...
- - "We do believe! We do trust you!"

In this whole matter of personal relationships it may eventually come to that point where you either believe, or you don't believe.....you either accept, or you don't accept.....you either trust, or you don't trust. That's precisely the thing that must happen between God and you....

...there may be that very critical moment when you either say, "I believe you, and I trust you".....and if you can't say it, may God have pity upon you.

Some of us believe that perhaps one of the most wonderful things ever to happen, it would be the ability to be able to say, "I trust you, God, I believe you."

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Jesus in His relationship to the disciples, was trying to make clear to them now that from this moment on things would be better, and things would be brighter. How you and I cling tenaciously to the happy thought that in the future things will be different, meaning, of course, that the change will be for the better. Even Jesus struck a chord much like this as He talked with the disciples prior to His going away. Not that things had been bad before - - - that wasn't the case. It was primarily that with God whatever is yet to come will always be better than what was. That's the way people began to think and to talk once they had been confronted by Jesus Christ. Now, having been confronted by Jesus Christ, whatever is yet to come will always be better than what was.

I think it can be said that prior to the coming of Jesus Christ many people, devoutly concerned, weren't quite sure as to the basic nature and character of God. They remembered His activity as they thumbed the pages, figuratively speaking, of the Old Testament. He could be a God of wrath - - He could be a terrible God of judgment. There were those who weren't quite sure. The kind of thing has permeated into our Sunday School life even in this generation; for one, while he is not happy in the thought, might be able to understand the little girl in Sunday School who said, "Jesus I like; God I don't like!" Once a person has come to know Jesus, to love Him and to trust Him, then he's able to love and to trust God! You can't separate the two.

And let it be understood at once that Jesus did not come into the world to change the heart and the mind of God. God is as He always was. God is good, God is love. What Jesus Christ has done for us....He has simply shown us perfectly and completely how wonderful God is - - opened our eyes - - shown

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us a new way into the heart of God -- a new way which is by Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ. That's why He said to His disciples, "From now on there can be such a thing as joy for you, if you trust God as you now say you trust me. From now on God's purposes can be fulfilled in your life -- if you believe in God as you say you believe in me." He loves you -- this is the wonderful thing that you and I have as believers in Jesus Christ! This new way to the heart of God is the way that's come to us in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. God is to be trusted.....God is to be believed...God's purposes for you and me will be fulfilled.....God's way of love is to be followed, perfectly and completely.

Jesus went on to tell them that if from this point on, if they would only believe completely what they had now said, there wouldn't be a thing that they would ever ask for from God, if they asked it in His name, that God wouldn't give! You know what that really means? If God was able to fulfill in Jesus Christ His purposes, so, to a degree, God can be able to fulfill His purposes in and through you and me. Can you think of anything more wonderful than that? We who have lived long enough not to trust ourselves, to be introduced to a God whom we can trust! This means transformation. This means redemption.

When I stand at the sacred desk I am fully aware that I am speaking to people who have some knowledge of God -- of course you have -- and you've tried to meet God's way with your life in some manner or another. But I couldn't be a pastor and a preacher of the Word for over a quarter of a century without also knowing that there are some of you who have tried, and who have failed. And because you have tried and because you have failed,

you are about to lose heart. And you wonder whether you ought to try again -- that is, to try God's way again.

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I must remind you that when they first began to build the Panama Canal, the first effort ended in catastrophic failure. All of the masonry, all of the loss of a number of men's lives, to say nothing of the expenditure of great sums of money.....and nothing but an ugly trench of mud. And there were those who came back, and said, "We will try again, and again. Who knows, perhaps another method -- who knows, perhaps a better way."

Whatever way you have been trying to take with God, try the new and tested method, which is by the way of Jesus Christ.

* * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

May 29, 1966

"IF A MAN LOVES - - "

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It happened yesterday morning in my office, and it proved itself to be a deeply gratifying experience. She'll forgive me, I'm quite certain, when I tell you that I wish you could have been within hearing distance, that in one way or another you might have been able to identify with the kind of thing that was taking place.

She's about twelve years of age. She's to be confirmed today in a special service in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart at 12:00 o'clock noon, following this service now. Together with other members of her family she has been overseas for the greater part of her life. Her father, in Government service, has been stationed in different parts of the world. Much of her religious training she has been receiving within the family circle, and wherever there has been a Christian community wherever they have lived. Because of a new assignment, and not being able to be present at the regular confirmation service today at 5:00, we're scheduling this special service for her at 12:00 o'clock noon.

And as you know, there must be the examination prior to confirmation. So this took place in a private session. I asked her what I thought were the important questions. The answers came. And then all of a sudden there was a turn of events - - she posed questions to me. Good questions. Very, very substantial questions.....

...but I must also tell you that to be appreciated is the fact that in anticipation of her confirmation, what is being done is something that Martin Luther said at the very beginning

should have been done, that the catechization should be something that occurred by the father and the mother, and this, you see, has been true in her case....because every now and then she'd say to me, "Now, my father told me that this was important" - or - "My mother said I shouldn't forget to pay attention to this."

...but now the questions came to me. And then there was that youthful tilt of her head, when pondering some deep fundamental doctrine of the Church she said to me, "But I don't quite understand....but I don't quite understand." And then I had to say to her, "Barbara, people have been saying this ever since the dawn of the Christian Church. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth and He had a company of disciples, and He would tell them certain things, and they would turn to Him, very much as you're turning now, with that puzzled look on the face, and say, "But I don't quite understand."

I think that's just about what was happening in the text that serves as the basis for today's sermon, the sermon that bears the title, "If A Man Loves." And the text, it's the 23rd verse of the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

This was the answer that Jesus gave to a disciple with a puzzled look on his face.

The puzzlement you can readily appreciate. It was one of those instances

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when Jesus was talking about what seemed to be double talk, and that is not said disrespectfully. Jesus was saying, "Today I'm going to be with you, but then, a little while, I am going to go away and you will see me no more."and then He would also say in what seemed to be the same breath, " I will never leave you - - I will never forsake you." He said something about, "I'm going away, but somebody else in my place is going to come, and He will take you and guide you and lead you in the way of truth."

And then He said something, very immediately now, "I shall go away, the world will no longer know me, but I will manifest myself to you.".....and that's the time when one of the disciples, with that question mark on his face, turned to Jesus and said, "What do you mean?" And then Jesus gave this answer, "If a man loves me and will keep my word, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will stay with him."

Now what you really have here is the fundamental problem of trying to keep God real. Please endeavor to understand this as we have a right to understand it, and as we're obligated to see it. The disciples had found something in Jesus Christ that changed their lives. The disciples as a little company had the good fortune to live with Him very close, and He made all the difference in the world.....

...think of it! - - always having Jesus Christ within reach

...think of it! - - no problem arises, but what you're

able to turn to God and say, "God, take over, will you?

Help us, God. We believe that you can."

For three years they had that kind of association with Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus Christ says, "I'm going away." He also says, "But I will con-

continue to manifest myself to you" - - that's the word that He used - -

"- - I will continue to make myself plain to you....I'll continue
to show myself in your presence."

Could there be anything more wonderful than that? - - to have the assurance that God will always be within reach, that God will always make Himself plain to us? Evidently they were overwhelmed in the thought of something as tremendous as that. You know, there are some of us who honestly believe that there isn't anything more wonderful than to be made aware of God.

Now, thrilled by this possibility, and yet somewhat puzzled, one of the disciples says, "How is this going to happen, and why will it be that you'll show yourself to us and not to the world?" - - if God is to be made manifest to a group of people exclusively - - why? And the question must be raised, you see, in view of the fact that if this is to happen, how can we be sure that it's going to happen to us? Now you have something! This was the band of disciples on whom Jesus Christ was about to found His Church.

This is the Day of Pentecost, recognized in many quarters throughout Christendom as the birthday of the Holy Christian Church. It is in and through the Church, we say, that God reveals Himself. How can we be certain that God is being made real to us? If God will not show Himself to everyone, if God will not reveal Himself to the world, If He promises to reveal Himself to the disciples.....how can we be so certain that we won't miss this wonderful experience? Undoubtedly this is why the disciple, with a question mark on his face, turned to Jesus, and Jesus answers him, "If a man loves me, if a man keeps my commands - - I will be real to him." And there is the answer.

My friend, have you asked yourself the question, how can I be sure that

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God goes on being real to me? - - then I must say to you, what is the measure of your obedience to Him? what is the measure of your love for Him, and for one another? "By this," said Jesus Christ, "shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another."

There's that word again. It was forever being used by Him. How could it be otherwise? With Jesus love is everything - - all that God is in Heaven above. And for us seemingly earth-bound creatures, the only way by which men are meant to live with each other, the only motivation by which a Christian should do anything to anyone, anywhere, at any time. But be sure to read those words of Jesus very carefully. It's God's kind of love that He's talking about, and there is a difference. All other kinds can bog down. They can be that futile. But the love which is born of God is a love that's sacrificial, is a love that suffers, is a love that asks no questions except the opportunity to witness, and to demonstrate what the individual knows in his own heart that God already has done for him.

When I went to India I found a woman in a place that, I say ever so quickly, because in our vocabulary as human beings it's the one expression, you see, that indicates the description that belongs to it - - it was seemingly god-forsaken....but it's the word, you know, that you daren't use, because the very fact that she was there spells the lie to its having been god-forsaken.

And I said to her, "How is it possible that you stay here day after day, year after year?" And her answer came quickly, "When one makes a commitment to Jesus Christ, He gives no alternatives.".....and out there, in that seemingly forsaken place, she goes on living a life of love. And there's no one

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within miles who has a greater demonstration of what God can be in a human being. She is literally, actually, making God transparent. And all because she loves, loves people.....loves people who are hard to love.....loves people who are unlovable, loves people who are not very promising.

You've never forgotten, have you, that in the sight of God you're not very attractive to Him. My soul, stained in sin, doesn't make a very pretty picture for Jesus Christ. But God who is Love goes on loving us, and identifying with us.

The basis for any Christian community is always its measure of love, love that's born out of obedience to Jesus Christ. You may find it a startling thing as you read the Scriptures of the sayings of Jesus Christ, that so frequently He refers to love, and He says, "I command you to love one another." And what is love? My friend Oscar Carlson, when we went from one place to another in our preaching mission overseas, delighted in using this definition: he said, "to love is to affirm the meaning of another person" - - to affirm the meaning of another person, that this person, you see, I would add ever so quickly, is a person to whom attention must be paid! The grandest line that Arthur Miller wrote into his play, "The Death of a Salesman" is when the poor benighted wife of Willy Loman cries out to her sons, who can't possibly understand how she could feel toward him as she did.....she simply says, "but attention has to be paid to people like him!" To love is always to pay attention, to give attention to a person's needs. One doesn't love by ignoring.

It doesn't happen accidentally, it happens by deliberate design, I tell you - - what you experienced last Sunday morning at 11:00 o'clock when a group of new members was being received. The question of questions is put, "In your affiliation with this parish now, do you commit yourself anew to Jesus Christ?

.....is this, your relationship with this congregation, an expression of your love for Christ, and your love for human beings?"

.....the question of questions will be put when the catechumen approaches the altar tonight at 5:00 o'clock. It's not in the rubrics of the service. It's a good and proper modification that can be made.....when the child is confronted in its impressionable years - - "Do you love the Lord Jesus, and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?"

This is the thing that the Christian community must give to the world most: its love for God and its love for one another.

Unfortunately in our day and age, we talk too much in the Christian Church. We argue too much in the Christian Family. We quibble and we quarrel, and we spend far too much time around the theological table, in which we have exercise after exercise of the mind.....and all the while the expression of the heart goes begging.

Let me give you a very home-spun example. Word had come to a certain church council in a small town community that such-and-such a person was in dire need. His house had been burned down, they needed replenishment of supplies. Someone suggested a prayer meeting, and the deacons gathered together, except one. And as they gathered together they discussed whether or not they had a right to pray! - - that God would work a miracle, and see that the needs of this man would be supplied.....and as they met, they argued back and forth whether one had a right to pray about this sort of thing, and whether or not God paid any attention to this kind of a prayer. And then before they knew it, they began taking to task the absent deacon, when there was a knock at the door. And there at the door (it's a very home-spun thing, I tell you) they

saw a boy, pulling a wagon heavily laden with food stuffs. And the boy said, "Dad couldn't quite make your meeting, but he sent his prayers - - here they are."

There is no substitute for demonstrated love, love for God which dictates love for one another. My friend, you talk about God becoming real to you. Is He a bit hazy for you? If the focus isn't very sharp, let me ask you, how real is your love for one another.... ?

" - - by this shall all men know that ye are
my disciples, if ye have love one for
another."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED NICODEMUS"

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The sermon for the day bears the title, "A Man Named Nicodemus" and the text is from the 3rd chapter of the Gospel according to John, it's the 1st verse:

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named
Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
The same came to Jesus by night - - "

The young man who delivered a meaningful address to a certain company of people gathered in Bieber Hall last night, a company of people made up for the most part of graduating seniors - - in his address he said something like this, sharing with them a quotation by William Barclay: that there are two great moments in the life of any man, that is the life of any man who makes his mark upon history. The one moment is when he definitely realizes for the first time where he was born and of whom he was born; the second great mark is when it dawns upon him why he was born at all.....that is, to what end will he live?.....what did God have in mind in allowing someone like him to come into this world?

Today's Gospel lesson talks about a man named Nicodemus, who never fully made the final discovery as to exactly why he was born into the world. Nicodemus is a case study of men who can go a very long way without Jesus Christ. They can chalk up for themselves very, very fine impressive records. Nicodemus amassed a small fortune, we have reason to believe this. He had far more in the bank than the average man in his day. He succeeded very well in this direction.....and without making any commitment to Jesus Christ.

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He was a man who went a long way in the established church of his dayand all of this without recognition of Jesus Christ. Of the many people in that thickly populated land of Palestine, only six thousand Jews ever were able to become Pharisees.....he was one of that select number. And of the six thousand, only seventy of them ever made it to enjoy a seat on the Sanhedrin.....Nicodemus went a long way without Jesus Christ, and made a very impressive record.

This is possible. It's one of the admissions that perhaps we who are Christian ought to be willing to make. One of the men who came to Nawakwa when I was there some thirty years ago did us a disservice - - in his chapel talk to us he said that he honestly believed that when a man became a Christian he could do a far better piece of work, he'd be far more skilled, he'd get farther in the world. This is not so. Many men who are not Christian will get a lot farther in the world than you and I will ever get. They might establish for themselves a position of prestige and honor, as far as this world is concerned. Man is very clever. He can go a long, long way without God.

But to the credit of Nicodemus, one day he discovered there was such a person as Jesus Christ, and he felt that he couldn't ignore Christ. So he came to Jesus Christ. And then Jesus engaged him in conversation.

It must have been a wonderful experience. Never in all the recorded pages of Scripture do we find anything quite like that dialogue that Jesus had with His night visitor. And Never do we find Jesus ever drawing the issue so carefully, so precisely, as He did with Nicodemus.

"Nicodemus," He said, "there are some things that you'll have to accept

that you can't understand....

Nicodemus, you'll have to begin at this point, that there are some things that you'll never be able to figure out....

Nicodemus, I tell you, that unless you are born again you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!"

.....the issue was drawn precisely and clearly.

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I wish I could tell you that Nicodemus said, "Jesus, you've convinced me!" But the record has it that Jesus had to face a man who walked away, uncommitted and unconvinced. We poor struggling preachers, who every time we go to the pulpit try to convince people of Jesus Christ, and who have it laid upon us that in every conversation and encounter that we have with people, that we ought to convince them of the fact of Jesus, draw some measure of comfort in the knowledge that Jesus, talking in a way that He had never talked to anybody, had a man walk away, unconvinced and uncommitted.

The truth of the matter is this, that Jesus lost more than He gained, a sad fact to accept. Nicodemus is a case study of all those who can go a long way without Jesus Christ.

I wish I could tell you that one day Jesus turned to His disciples and He said to them, "I can't wait to tell you - - you remember how I told you about that encounter that I had with Nicodemus? -- he walked away, unconvinced and uncommitted? - - well, he came back! and he said to me, 'Jesus, you're right! I must have a change in my heart, I must be baptized by the Holy Spirit. God must work a miracle inside me, and He has! - - and I now fall at your feet, to claim you Lord and Saviour.'".....Jesus was never

able to say that.

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There are many men in our day who go a long way without Jesus Christ and establish impressive records. Maybe you could be one of them! Never since the dawn of the Christian Church have we had the number of people who take the name of Christ who speak disparagingly of the Christian faith, who no longer read the Scriptures convincingly, who even down-grade their Lord and their Saviour - - - never since the dawn of the Christian Church have we had a group of people rise up and say, even from within the ranks of the Christian faith -- "God is dead." All of this is symptomatic of a generation that can go a long way without God...

....we're doing very nicely....who needs God?

Nicodemus is somewhat of a man like that. Oh, we cherish the thought that at the time of the death of Jesus he came and brought some precious ointment and aloe for the burial. Some men can go a long way without Jesus. But until they are "born again" -- (a perfectly good expression, it just requires more than casual reflection as to its meaning -- don't you dare ignore its possibilities)

...I give thanks to God that I grew up in a town when occasionally a traveling revivalist-evangelist would come to town. And even then I had no appreciation for his technique and for his approach - - but I do give thanks to God that still ringing in my ear is the way he stood in front of that little company of people, pointing his finger at us, and said, "Ye must be born again! Ye must be born again!" The older I become, the more I say

to myself, he's echoing and re-echoing the words of
Jesus Christ, the only one qualified to speak at
this point....

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Our Lord's night visitor was greatly puzzled. And it looks as though he
was unable to resolve the matter immediately. But Christ gave him a great
deal to think about -- He always does -- life-changing things to think about,
and any conversation with Jesus Christ eventually ends up into a matter that
becomes a matter of life-or-death.

Ye must be born again, my friend. What are the earmarks of one who is
born anew in Christ? Well, first off, the realization that God is his Heaven-
ly Father, that Jesus Christ should dwell in his heart -- that from hence-
forth all that he does and all that he would become, he would act and think
in the manner and spirit of Jesus Christ. The Church rightfully and properly
says in the Sacrament Jesus comes to us as He does not come at any other time
and in any other way, if you have a hunger and thirst for Him.

And if once you've received the Sacrament and in one way or another you
can put your finger upon the pulsebeat of Christ within your heart, then you
ought to have the assurance that you're being born again.

Man can go a long way without Jesus Christ, but without Christ, no mat-
ter how far he can go, he'll never make it to the gate of Heaven.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE HEART SEARCHER"

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For the most part, since last September and through the end of this month sermons being preached from this pulpit have been based upon passages of the Gospel according to John. The series soon comes to an end. Today's sermon bears the title "The Heart Searcher" and there are really three verses of Scripture, from the second chapter of John, which constitute the basis of this meditation.

"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.
But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,
And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

It's that closing part, you see - - "and he knew what was in man."
Did you ever try honestly to figure out what it must have been like when Jesus was here on earth? It's so easy when we cry, you see, for somebody on whose shoulder we can weep, to believe that He was the gentle Jesus, meek and mild; it is so easy, you see, when we're hurt, and we are misunderstood, to think that this was the only kind of Christ, who went around walking from village to village, from place to place, in Galilee.

But in sober moments of reflection we are reminded that there was also the Christ who had a way of looking at people, searching their hearts, putting them to the test - - staring straight into their souls. It's that kind of Christ, presumably, to which our attention must be drawn in the

preaching of this sermon - - the Heart Searcher.

For many of us the Book of Psalms remains the favorite in the Old Testament. Then when we turn to this favorite Book we talk about the favorites that we have in the favorite Book. Immediately there comes to mind Psalm number 23.....Psalm number 46.....Psalm number 27.....Psalm number 121. Your list perchance may also include what is so significant for me -- Psalm number 139.....

....it's a Psalm that deals with the omniscience of God

....it's a Psalm that deals with the omnipresence of God

.....it is the Psalm that deals with the power of God.

....it's a Psalm that reminds us that you can't possibly escape Him - - He is everywhere present. It even reads like this:

"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there - - "

It's a Psalm that reminds us that as far as God is concerned, there is no place to hide. I find this rather comforting, and of course I find it reassuring.

But I also find it an awesome thing when I read ever so seriously the other words in that Psalm, that come near the end of that passage:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my thought.
And if there be any evil way in me,
lead me in the way everlasting."

It's a frightening thing to think this about God, that He is one from whom no secrets can be hid.....and then to think that there are people who can be brave enough, and honest enough, and earnest enough, to deliberately expose themselves to the heart of God, the mind of God.

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Think of all the things we keep from one another. Think of how you and I, human as we are, deliberately try to present a good case to somebody else, when we ourselves know the truth! Or perhaps, human as we are, not knowing the truth, we shadow-box, and make so much of the insignificant and the inconsequential, and pass judgment long before we know the facts....and then for any one of us to be able to come to the Searcher of men's hearts, the Knower of men's minds, and to say to Him from whom no secrets can be hid....."Search me, O God -- know me, and try me."

Dante Gabriel Rosetti, I am told, has a very unusual drawing. It's a drawing which is his interpretation of the encounter of Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ. With the perception of the artist, he has Mary Magdalene walking pell-mell down the streets of a Galilean or Judean village, reckless, sensual, earthy. Then in one terrible moment she looks up into an open window and sees someone with His gaze directed upon her, His eyes focused clearly upon her....she discovers what she cannot escape, the searching glance of Jesus Christ.

Ours, you know, is a generation that goes tripping through life, singing a theme song that God isn't around. Ours is a generation of pagans. If one could really deal with a true statistic it could be as revealing as this: that there are more people who either live or believe that God doesn't have to have attention paid to Him, that you just won't confront Him, and Mary Magdalene-fashion up to a point, you go tripping through life, gaily, recklessly, sensually -- tied to the things of this world.

I for one will always endeavor to root and ground my life in the Scrip-

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tures. If I want to know what God is like, I will turn to the Holy Bible. If I want to know what Jesus Christ is like, I will turn to the Gospel record. If I want to know what happens when people take Him seriously, I will read the succeeding chapters following the Gospel record in the New Testament. This will be for me an understanding of Jesus Christ -- this for me will be an understanding of the ways of God; and I shan't for too long a time pay too much attention to those who, upon the wisdom of their own hearts, tell us that God is this or God is that.

When one takes his stand, then, upon the Scriptures, this is the God who is revealed: the God who does confront people, the God who confronts people in Jesus Christ. And again I ask you, did you ever stop to think what it must have been like to have been in a Galilean or Judean village, and one day have somebody walk up to you, as no one else had ever walked up, engage you in conversation, then probe to the very depth of your heart -- who had to listen to you say all the things that you honestly didn't quite understand about yourself, to have to wait while you paraded in front of Him all the things that you believed perhaps were true, and yet, you had no foundation for what you were saying.....and then all the while you were talking, He who knew the whole story, or as John put it, and he had a right to speak, "He who knew what was in man" remains the Searcher of a man's heart, lets him talk, and then -- tells the story from God's point of view!.....and as over against that searches a man's heart.

How, for the life of me, any of us can ever read John's Gospel and not walk away awestruck by the fact that Jesus Christ is the Searcher of men's hearts, I cannot tell you. John surely was able to say and to write what

he did about Jesus from inside information -- if you please, from first-hand experience. That's why we can be especially impressed by those closing words in the second chapter -- "For ~~he~~ himself knew what was in man."

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Do you remember that encounter with a woman that He had at Jacob's well?...when she came and she talked about everything else under the sun except the thing that she knew was on His mind, and how she tried to skirt the issue again and again. And all the while He stayed there, the Searcher of her heart. You know, don't you, that essentially for most of us our own hearts are a mystery. We're never quite sure why we say sometimes the things we say -- we're never quite sure at times why we do the things we do. And because sometimes we judge ourselves for the things we do, we're never quite sure that we know who we are, because there is such a thing as the depravity of human nature. And this church in which we claim membership has never ruled out that significant part of our liturgy in which we remind ourselves Sunday after Sunday -- "we are by nature sinful and unclean -- "

....the woman at Jacob's well couldn't get rid of Jesus

Christ. He just stayed there.

And the longer He stayed the more she ~~waw~~ herself. It had never happened to her before. And this, you see, is one of the things that people tell us is unique about Jesus Christ -- no one can be as judgmental as He. No one can speak with so great authority where the human soul is involved. Of whom else has it ever been said that "he knew what was in man"?

And then after a while, how long it took I don't know, she got away from Jesus and she went back to her own home, and she went from person to person

and told about this man that she had met, who told her things about herself. And when Jesus Christ starts telling us things about ourselves, it's not always a pretty story. But the Searcher of men's hearts could do it, and He did it.

Christ was and is the Searcher-of-Men's-Hearts, and as over against this thought we'd better bring a healthy respect to it, for herein lies the only hope for our salvation. There's a German preacher who tells about the little boy who, when his dad came home from work, would always run and hide, because his dad had an uncanny way of knowing whether or not the boy had behaved that day. He knew that his father had only to look at him, and to be able to probe the very depth of his heart. There are people like that in relationship to Jesus Christ. They hardly want to give Him time enough to have their hearts searched. It's a lot easier to keep our own pre-conceived notion, it's a lot easier to cling to our own sins, than to meet someone who tells us we've got to give them up.

Christ was and is the Searcher-of-Men's-Hearts. We can afford to bring a healthy respect to this fact, for in this lies the hope for our salvation. We are essentially a mystery to ourselves. Subsequently there are certain things we'll never find out about ourselves except as He reveals them to us. When I began my ministry there were certain things I encountered for the first time. I had never encountered it before until I met a lady who said, "My husband is a strange man, Pastor -- he needs medical attention, but he won't go to the doctor because he's afraid of what the doctor is going to tell him -- he thinks he knows what the diagnosis will be."

And there are people like that. Jesus Christ is the Physician of the

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of the soul, and there are people like that, who are afraid to have Jesus Christ tell them what is wrong! And yet, until the physician is given a chance to make the diagnosis and to declare it, how can he offer the corrective? We can afford to trust Jesus Christ. He'll not only show us what's wrong, but above all else He'll offer the only corrective.

Honestly now, after having been with you for ten and one-half years, in some instances I'm not quite certain how some of you people think of God. I know how I must preach Him to you. I know that every time I come to this sacred desk I am constrained to remind you that you have to do business with God. Whether or not you wish it otherwise, you'll never be able to escape Him.

And you can't write your own ticket in the mind of God. You can never dictate to God what you think He ought to do. Some of the wisest of all people, steeped in the traditions of the Old Testament, say to us ever so convincingly, "be still, and wait." But we are the ones who tell God, and I hope you've found this in my preaching, that we are to wait upon the Lord that He may reveal himself to us.....and then I go on talking to you about Jesus Christ -- God's complete and perfect revelation, whose arms outstretched in love are also the arms that belong to One who has a searching eye, who can be very demanding, and will not for a minute toy with sin and make light of it. And because He loves us He keeps talking about our sins, because He knows that if He doesn't talk about our sins we'll never know what it is to be saved!

Somewhere in my preaching I hope you've caught by this time the fact that you and I may run recklessly pell-mell down the street of life, and

then some day, somewhere, there will be an encounter.....and He'll never take His eyes away from you.

Studdert Kennedy wrote a poem once reflecting many, many things. It's called "A Cockney Soldier's Dream After Church"....it also has the title "The Sorrows of God." Paul Scherer used to delight in using it in some of his sermons. Let me read it for you....

"I seemed to stand alone, beside
a solemn kind of sea.
Its waves they got in my inside,
And touched my memory.
And day by day, and year by year,
My life came back to me - - "

....and then presumably in this poem he goes with this parade of people, this remembrance of incidents, and throughout this whole parade of happenings there is Jesus Christ coming again and again, looking at him through the eyes of these people with whom he has had to deal - - always the eyes of God.....

"All eyes was in His eyes - all eyes,
My wife's and a million more; - "

...and then in a very vivid and graphic way he refers to the prostitute in London, and even though she was willing, now God's eyes are revealed through her, and he says.....

"And they was sad.....'ow sad
With tears that seemed to shine,
And quivering bright with the speech of light
They said 'er soul was mine.'

And then at last 'e said one word,
'E said just one word - - 'Well?'

...you know that happens sometimes when somebody searches our hearts, and then suddenly we see the picture as we had never seen it before...

"And then at last 'e said one word,
'E said just one word - - 'Well?'
Add then I said in a funny voice,
'Please, sir, can I go to Hell?'

And He stood there and looked at me,
And He kind o' seemed to grow
Till He shone like the sun above my head,
Add then He answered, No.
You can't; that Hell is for the blind
And not for those that see.
You know that you have earned it, lad,
So you must follow Me.

Follow me on by the paths of pain,
Seeking what you have seen,
Untill at last you can build the 'is'
With the bricks of the 'might have been.'

That's what He said, as I'm alive
And that there dream was true.
But what He meant, I don't quite know;
Though I know what I have to do.
I've got to follow what I've seen
Till this old carcass dies;
For I daren't face in the land of grace
The sorrow of those eyes. - - "

...now get this:

" There ain't no throne, and there ain't no book,
It's 'im you've got to see,
It's Him, just Him that is the judge
Of blokes like you and me.
And boys I'd sooner frizzle up
In the flames of burning Hell,
Than stand and look into His face,
And hear His voice say - Well?"

Beloved, would you take it from me this morning, as I hope you would
take it from me every other morning that I've stood with you - - - in the
presence of God we just can't trust ourselves. But He who searches our
hearts and knows our minds, who stares straight into the soul - - you can
afford to trust Him. And herein lies the hope of our salvation.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TEXT OF TEXTS"

The sermon bears the title, "Text of Texts"; and there's the momentary inclination to suggest that all of us declare the text together. But I shan't ask you to do it, though you are fully able to do it. The text is John 3:16, and even in this moment now, if you were asked to do it, there could be a kind of reverent ripple, shall I put it, in recital:

"For God so loved the world that he gave
his only begotten Son, that whosoever
believeth in him should not perish, but
have everlasting life."

It's the text that we first memorized, you know, and undoubtedly the text that we'll longest remember.

By the way, I should tell you that Frank Boreham, the distinguished Australian preacher, once pursued a hobby of his: to make a study of the favorite passages of Scripture of famous men. Somehow or other he was led to believe that behind every famous God-fearing man there could be one particular verse of Scripture that sustained him....when people didn't understand him (and this is always the price of leadership) -- that there might be one verse of Scripture that he could recite to himself, and in its recital get a renewed grip on life, and have a heart filled with courage....that when people might not be able to be sure of his purposes, and yet when he was certain that God's purposes in his life would be fulfilled -- surely, Frank Boreham thought, there must be for this man one selected verse of Scripture which more than any other speaks to his condition.

This Frank Boreham believed, and his study revealed a fascinating thing.

...the favorite text, for instance, of Martin Luther -- you know it, don't you? -- "The just shall live by faith".....how this gave him courage, with great blessing, as time and again he was driven to his knees....

...or when he began studying the life of David Livingstone...who went to darkest Africa, and faced one obstacle after another, physical, emotional, mental, spiritual -- who because of his commitment to Jesus Christ faced the danger of the wildlife, and went in later years limping along with a paralyzed side and a withered hand because of the attack of a lion -- who in darkest Africa had to know the separation of a devoted friend, his beloved wife, and buried her there. Frank Boreham said, what keeps a man like that going? Is there a verse above all verses in the Bible that gives strength and imparts courage?

.....and lo and behold, he discovered that for David Livingstone it was this verse: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And when David Livingstone was called upon one time to comment upon this verse, he simply said, with the utmost of reverence for Jesus Christ, "It is the word of a gentleman, and He's to be trusted."

So he gathered all of these together in his book. By the way, the book carries a very interesting title, this collection of the favorite texts of famous men -- he calls it "A Bunch of Everlastings" -- because that's exactly what the Good Book is. It deals with the eternal truth of God.

I have not come here this morning to talk to you about the favorite texts of famous men, but I have come to talk to you about the text which, generally speaking, is everybody's text, everybody's favorite.....again let me say, the first to be memorized, the longest to be remembered. And if the Good Book

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were to be thumbed by their turning back, figuratively speaking, to one page more than any other, it could be the page that has John 3:16. There are those scholars who tell us that maybe for literary value it is not the most beautiful of all verses. There are scholars who make it a business, you see, to criticize and to pick and to tear apart.....and they even find fault with this.....but after they've done it, you still cling to it, don't you? And you and I live out our years on the basis of the truth of the Gospel as it's found in John 3:16.

What are the reasons why this should be every man's favorite? Well, first off, could it be that every one of us wants to be loved? It's the most wonderful thing that ever happens to a person, to know that he's being loved, that someone's paying attention to him. How did they say it a generation ago, when they found out suddenly that the eldest daughter in the family was falling in love -- they said "So-and-So is paying attention to her" and when that attention was being paid to her, her life was coming into a measure of fulfillment that she couldn't possibly experience before. Down deep in the heart of every single human being there is the hunger to be loved.

And by the same token, down deep in the heart of every single human being there is the desire to know something of the nature and of the character of God. I am numbered among those who earnestly believe that there is no such thing as a 100% atheist. Life has a way of bringing a man to his knees. Life itself has a way of forcing a man to regard the fact that there is Something or Somebody over and above and beyond himself. Life can take care of that all right. When these experiences begin to happen in a man's life, even though he may not have the advantage of religious training such as you and I have had, he wonders what this Something or this Someone is like. He begins to ask all

kinds of questions.

And none is ever as satisfying, none is ever as true, as when he's given to understand that God is love, and that God loves us....that God pays attention to us....

....that God in love suffers with us

.....that God in love is patient with us

.....that God in love agonizes with us

.....that God in love sacrifices for us

This is the great truth of the Christian religion -- not simply that God is, but that God loves.

Do I have to tell you that in love there is always strength? that in love there is always confidence and security? that in love there is always courage? Some of us begin to get weary after a while of reading all the laments that are being said about this world in which we live. One just isn't "hep", you see, until he can be critical. Children criticize their parents -- parents criticize their children.....leaders criticize their people -- people criticize their leaders. We find fault. It's the easiest thing in the world to do. And some of us hardly pick up a paper any more, some of us hardly read a magazine article, some of us hardly ever read a book, without having simply in front of us the result of all the things that are wrong.....an age of protest, an age of negativism. Not that any of us would ever deny a man to criticize, not that any of us would ever deny a man the right to examine, not that any of us would ever deny a man the right to search and to probe. But there's something more in life than just criticizing.

And that's why it's a tremendous thing to remember, that when we find all the things that are wrong with us, to be able to recognize the resources that

we have, the resources that we have in a God who is, and in a God who loves us. Maybe we ought to declare a moratorium for a while on all the fault-finding in the world and concentrate upon the resources that are being made available to us to help correct the thing that we deem wrong.

God is love. This means He makes available to us unbounded resources by which to help correct the ills that loom so largely upon us.

God loves us; There's a hunger in the heart to be loved. In this world of which we are a part, as we rush pell-mell down the street, we can stumble, and we can fall, and we can get hurt. We rush into things, and we rush into people, and they push us around, and they bother us and that troubles us. And then sometimes when we're crushed, even as a child -- and all of us in God's sight are as children...

....do you remember when as a child you stubbed your toe, and the only thing that you could think of was to get home as fast as you could, and to go and tug away at your mother's knee, and there you cried your heart out....and a mother in love waited patiently, and in and through that love you received a kind of resource that made you go back and live another day, enabled you to go back and walk down the same street, enabled you to go by the same place where you stubbed your toe....

.....and all because you didn't concentrate on the fact that you had stubbed your toe, but simply because you happened to remember that there was one to whom you could run and who in love gave you the courage to go back again.

God is like that! We are the ones who stumble. But you must also remember that there is a kind of love that God has for us that not only com-

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forts us and gives us courage, but also chastises and rebukes. It's the wise mother who, when she seeks to comfort and console her child, will also give a measure of rebuke and say, " -- but you shouldn't have run so fast! -- -- you should have looked where you were going."....and in love took us to task for what we ourselves had brought upon ourselves...

....that God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Jesus Christ in love, is always the God who is taking us to task, He's always the God who says, "You're a sinner." You know that God uses that name for us, don't you?

But God does more than use names, God does more than say names. God always acts in love. And this is what we must remember. And the resources of love are boundless, the resources of love are endless. There is no end to what can happen for good when a man is being encouraged by the positive force of those who care, and those who love. So God remains for us the great Lover, God remains for us the great Encourager. That's why this text has an appeal for us, you see. It tells us about a God who loves and who makes available for us the resources of love.

God loves. God loves whom? The text says, "God so loves the world -- -- "and if you have a pencil handy, that's the word that you have to underline for the moment in the reading of this text. When I was a youngster in Sunday School, they taught me to say God loves you, meaning God loves me. That's the point at which I began in my religious experience -- the awareness that God loves me. And this is a priceless thing, and for a whole generation this was the theme of the Church. It was geared and aimed directly at persons, the individual appropriation and appreciation of the Gospel.....

...God loves you.....God loves you.....God loves you.

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But there's a risk, I tell you, if one remains simply on the "God loves me" level. A man as he matures in his religious experience must also recognize the fact that God loves other people. It's a priceless thing in the life of a child when he can run to his mother's knee and know that she loves him; but his maturing is never quite complete until he can accept the fact that some other child can run to his mother's knee and also receives the same kind of undivided attention.

We have a great distance to go, many of us, in the maturing of our Christian experience, in our maturing of the concept of God's love. It's amazing how many of us begin and end with the thought that "God loves me, and only me". We Christians are guilty of that!

....ever so often we permit ourselves to believe that God loves
only Christians

...we Americans sometimes, as a people, are guilty that we have a favorite spot in God's heart. We even write hymns about it, we write songs about it, and we recite for ourselves the evidences in which God has smiled upon us, as though in His smiling upon us He didn't pay attention to somebody else!

...we people of a particular shade to our skin sometimes have a way of believing that we have a particular place in God's heart
You see, the text didn't say, "God so loved me." The text says, "God so loved the world - - ".....and that's everybody.

And that leads us to believe that God in His love, as He wants to redeem the individual, also wants to redeem the community! You just can't drive through Brookville Road without saying to yourself, "God loves this place."

.....you can't go into any section of the disadvantaged without possibly being constrained to say, " - - and God loves this miserable situation, too!" You can't redeem the individual apart from his community. God loves the individual in his communal setting. God loves the world. And much of our difficulty stems from the fact that we either put blinders on our eyes when we think of God's love, or we put blinders on God's heart when we talk about His love for us....." - - God so loved the world - - "

This God who loves, loves the world, but with what kind of love? A kind of love that is active, a kind of love that identifies, a kind of love that suffers. This idea, it seems to me, was so great and so magnificent, that that's why the people in the day of Jesus Christ rejected Jesus Christ. They couldn't quite believe that a God would humble himself, that a God would identify himself. that a God would suffer with people in their plight. And the only kind of love that's worth knowing is the kind of love that gives, and identifies.....and that's why you can't possibly underestimate the precious thing that happened here a moment ago, when these teenagers in the impressionable years of their life were saying, "It's the love of Christ that constrains us to go wherever there is a particular kind of need that people may know of the love of God - - let it be demonstrated through me."

God in His love loves perfectly and completely and to the end. And the full blessings of His love belong only to those who believe. You have to catch that - - that whosoever believes can take to himself the full blessing of God's love. It's always a tragic thing in the family situation, when people who are being loved do not allow themselves to take to themselves the full benefit of what's being offered. The love that God has for us is a per-

fect love, and a complete love, and a sacrificial love.

Let me close by sharing with you a simple illustration that the pastor in my home church delighted in telling. As a youngster I grew up in the aftermath of World War I, and every now and then he recited this illustration. Many of you perhaps will not recognize the man's name nor his personality. It's an illustration dealing with Sir Harry Lauder, the gallant soul with a happy heart who went spreading cheer and sunshine wherever he went, and then every now and then he'd wax extremely serious. And Sir Harry Lauder told how during the days of World War I or shortly thereafter he was walking with his son down the streets of New York, and when they were in a certain tenement area, his little boy looked at him and said, "Daddy, what's that in that window?"

...and hanging in the window was a small flag with a star on it. Now some of you more than others know exactly what that meant. When a family gave to the country a son, and if he died on the field of battle, there was a particular quality to that star....

...so Harry Lauder explained to his son that that meant that the people in that house sacrificed a son. And as they went walking down the street in that tenement area and the twilight hour almost ran its course, the little boy looked up and there appearing for the first time to his eye that night was the evening star. And in childlike innocence the boy says to his daddy, "Look, Daddy, God gave a Son, too."

That's what this text keeps reminding us. We're the ones for whom Someone has died. We're the objects of so great love. It's the great text. It

answers all the important questions - - who, what, why. It brings into sharp focus the fact of God, revealing clearly His nature and His action and His purpose. And wonder of wonders, it puts you and me and every other single soul right into the middle of it all since whatever God does is with us in mind! At the thought of something so grand as this, don't start strutting, my friend. It isn't because we're that important; it's just because God's that good and His love is that great - - "

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"A NATION UNDER GOD"

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The nearer this day came, this day that immediately precedes a national holiday, there are two verses from the Good Book that made their claim upon my mind and heart, and as I stand before you now I am constrained to read them as the text for today's sermon: Psalm 67, verses 1 and 2:

"God be merciful unto us and bless us,
and cause his face to shine upon us,
That thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving health among all nations."

You ought to know how these words were first spoken. I wish I could tell you precisely. Interestingly enough, there are two schools of thought. One school of thought maintains that Sinecharib had come with his hosts and he had wrought havoc; but then the children of Israel one day discovered that he was retreating. The enemy had gone away, and this land that they cherished would remain their land. Devastation might be in evidence to the right and to the left and as far as their eye could see, but yet it was still theirs. The enemy had gone away. They had fought brilliantly, they had engaged themselves sacrificially. Now the enemy had gone. And in that time of victory one man stood up and shouted the name GOD.

The other school of thought maintains that prosperity had been established. The harvest of the fields had been gathered - - and how they recognized themselves in a very strange situation: they were affluent...they had never known such blessings of the fields....they had never known such time of prosperity. And against that background one man stood up, reverently puts his finger to his lips, and says GOD.

You may take your choice. You may accept either school of thought - - you'll come out at the same place! It was a time of plenty; it was an hour of accomplishment.

But men sometimes talk about God in the strangest places. Men on occasion will talk about God in the strangest times....

....you expect people to talk about God when they come to church

....you expect people to talk about God when they have a

religious service, to mention His name - - it would be an interesting thing to take our book of worship and to discover how often we use the name God even in our liturgy. He is the dominating one, you see, whenever we come together, and His name, even His name is so much upon our lips

....you expect people to take the name of God with reverence when they have a Bible study session

You can't do it, of course you can't do it, and I wouldn't let you do it if you could do it: listen in on some of the conversation that I have with parishioners. If you could have in one way or another heard what took place in a telephone conversation - - you won't hear the details, but you'll be overjoyed, of course you'll be overjoyed, when I echo for you her words to me....."Pastor, we believe in the art of conversation. And every now and then my daughter invites guests into our home, and while they're there, we talk, and we're never ashamed to interject Jesus Christ into the conversation."

Every now and then His name does appear in strange places, and at strange times. We who are so prone to talk about Him only when we fold

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our hands in prayer, and bow our heads reverently, and listen while a preacher proclaims the Word from a sacred desk, it's an exceedingly gratifying and salutary thing to know that in the unusual and perhaps in the unexpected, very properly the name of God looms upon the horizon. This is the point at which you have to begin when you deal with this text. In the unexpected time of victory and accomplishment and prosperity, one man stands up and says GOD.

This is an extraordinary thing. It would have been so easy for the hosts of Israel to have said, "Did we not fight brilliantly? - - did we not face the enemy with dogged determination? It's by our hand that the enemy has been driven from our borders. Ever since man began to fight, he's always been quick to claim for himself accomplishment and victory, so vigorously has the Old Adam established himself in every one of us.

Or take for instance when the fields had brought their increase. It would have been so easy for the peasants of Israel to have said, "We toiled diligently, we cultivated, it is by the strength of our hands that the fields have filled our barns."

....'God be merciful unto us and bless us - - cause your face to shine upon us' - - - there are those who say that everything uttered here was in the past tense - this has already happened! This man stands up to put it that way.

I have never frowned upon the possibility of seeing America through the eyes of other people. On trips taken abroad, whenever possible I engaged those folks on the other side of the Atlantic in conversation. Not too long ago there was a brilliant man came to our land and spent considerable weeks here, a considerable amount of time. He read our news-

papers, he read our comic strips, he read our magazines, he watched our television, he went to the Broadway shows, he listened to the conversation in bus terminals and air terminals. Then he went home and wrote a book. It has a striking title: "The Eternal Dimension." He gave the title because he felt that was the thing that he discovered was lacking in the conversation that he heard, in the books that he read, in the plays that he saw when his television set was on. Somehow God had been removed from our thinking....

...the psalmist stood up, perhaps a solitary voice, and
said GOD.

I stand before you now to call your attention to several things about it. It isn't enough to say that he called our attention to God in that moment of victory and time of plenty. But the very remarkable thing occurred that when he talked about God, he said that God was doing something for those people, He did it despite their undeserving. When he talked about God, he talked about the mercy of God. When he talked about God, he talked about the graciousness of God...and you know what grace is -- grace is receiving something which you can't possibly earn and which you don't really deserve. In that time of plenty and prosperity and victory, he says, whatever God has allowed us as a people, He has allowed us because of the kind of God He is and not because of the kind of people we are! His grace has been showered upon us despite our undeserving.

It takes a brave man to say that to people. It takes quite a prophet to tell that to America today. We who enjoy a position on the face of the earth known to no other people can very easily, and all too frequently, take

pride in our creativity, take pride in our industry, take pride in our ingenuity. And we say to ourselves, well, if those other people would only get up and begin to dig in, if those other people would only work as hard as we have worked, if those other people would only be as industrious as we.....you see how we talk and how we think...

"God be merciful unto us and bless us; and cause
his face to shine upon us."

The third thing that happened was this: the man who declared these words said, "All right, let the fact of God be established. Let His beneficent hand be recognized - - call it mercy, call it grace - - "

...and then the psalmist says, "He is a God who deals
responsibly with us, He is a God who gives, a God who

will hold us responsible with what we do with what He gives."

To the everlasting credit of this man who stood up and he said, "God be merciful to us and God be gracious to us - - "...for a purpose! "God, whatever you give to us, look upon us as a channel. Let somebody else be blessed because we have been blessed."

It's an interesting thing to look back over your years, the sermons you've heard. I go back to those days in my small home town. It's a discreditable thing, I tell you, against me, not him - - I don't remember too many of his sermons....ah, but I remember the man! There's only one illustration that he ever used that I continue to remember. Maybe it's because I had ready ears and I was fascinated. He talked about Lindburgh. It was right after Lindburgh had successfully accomplished his mission - - what a

daring one!....in a tiny craft....one man. My home-town pastor in his sermon said, "In his time of great achievement, I wonder if when he landed in France, if he said anything or thought anything about God, who had helped to make it possible....and if he thought anything at all about what God wanted to do from that moment on, with this remarkable achievement."
as much as to say, what purpose does God have in mind in allowing a man to wing across the Atlantic and to do something that no other person had ever done -- to open a whole brand new world! The psalmist, who lived centuries before Jesus Christ, was sensible enough to say, "God, give us a blessing, but help us to remember that when you give us a blessing, you hold us responsible for what we'll do." That's why he can say ever so quickly in his second verse....."that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.

Israel never had a more shining hour than when she recognized herself as a chosen people who became a chosen vessel, a chosen channel by which God would bring a blessing to all other people on the face of the earth! A man for whom I have unusually high regard was once asked, "If you had your choice to be born as anyone belonging to a particular group of people, what choice would be yours?" And he said, "I would be grateful to God if I could have been born a Jew -- to have known that I could be listed among one group of people on the face of the earth especially considered as a channel by which God's blessing ultimately would be revealed and shared with all the people on the face of the earth." To the everlasting credit of the psalmist, he recognized that God, when He gave anything, God would hold a man responsible for what he would do with it. God always gives with a purpose in mind! There's

a divine economy that is always at work and God's not about to waste.

Interesting how you look back now, and you remember your early days of fatherhood....the shock that I had when one of our boys came and asked, "Dad, give me fifty cents." Why, in all the days of my years as growing up, I was never bold enough to ask my father for fifty cents! For some strange reason I had wit enough to say to him, "Fifty cents -- and if I give it to you, what will you do with it?"and I say to you now, by way of reflection, there's a parable. We are the ones who are always asking God to deal with us extravagantly -- "God, give us so great sums." Dare we believe that God in turn will say to us, "And if I give it to you, what will you do with it?" Said this psalmist, when he spoke in behalf of his nation, "God bless us; God, cause your face to shine upon us....and then, God, when this happens, let all the other nations on the face of the earth be blessed."

There are two things that a person ought to do every now and then, and it is good discipline and a very healthy exercise: take a piece of paper, provide yourself with two columns. One: BLESSINGS RECEIVED. Come now, do it some day. It is a poor song, it's poor music, but the point ought never be missed -- "Count Your many blessings: Name them one by one."

Suppose you did this. I can't tell you what might appear on your list, but I can tell you what would appear on mine....

....I'd thank Him for the blessing received in the knowledge that there are people who love me, that there are people on the face of this earth who have a concern for me as they may not have a concern for anybody else. That's not a vain thing to do, to acknowledge so great a love on the part of perhaps one person, or two people, or your family circlethis is a blessing that ought to be named, that God has given

me a measure of health, that God has given me a zest for life, that God has allowed me to number the days of my years, never to have to look where my next meal is going to come from -- honestly! Even when we grew up in the Depression.....I happen to belong to that group of people who know that there is such a thing, that one time occurred -- and of all the things that we were denied, this little family of an immigrant, there was always food in front of us -- not much, but always something. There isn't a single person within the hearing of my voice right now who, whatever his anxiety may be, surely this will not be an anxiety....."Will I have Sunday dinner, or won't I have Sunday dinner?" And yet perhaps half of the people on this earth go wondering whether their children will have enough to eat.

Other blessings I could name....

....the knowledge that Jesus Christ is my Saviour, chiefest of all blessings. None of us has the guarantee of the next five minutes. And suppose your earthly pilgrimage should come to an end -- you have the assurance that when you die you shall remain securely in the arms of God's love. This is no small matter! This is a matter of life, Eternal Life!

List your blessings -- "God be merciful to us -- come on, God, show me a favorable glance." List them all.

Now that second column.

Column #1: BLESSINGS RECEIVED.

Column #2: BLESSINGS CHanneled INTO THE LIVES OF OTHER PEOPLE

....what will that column look like? We who live in this af-

fluent America - - where are the people who have known a blessing through our affluence? We who have had the benefit of education, we who have had the benefit of a certain amount of culture - - where are the other people, even perhaps within five, ten minutes of the place where you are seated now, who might know something of the blessing that you've had in your situation in life?

And now I return to the fact that tomorrow is a national holiday. One applies the basic truth of this text to his own personal life, he applies it to himself as one who lives in America. And one of the grand and good things about us is that as a nation we continue to keep in our vocabulary such an expression as this. A nation under God. I have never made light of it; in fact, I stand in awe of the expression. God has blessed us as a people. Not at the expense of other people has He caused His face to shine upon us - - the fact remains His face has shown upon us. But there will be a time of judgment when He will hold me responsible not only as a Christian but also as one who has lived in America.

I bring this sermon to a conclusion by asking you to recall the words of Rudyard Kipling, England's great poet. It was a time of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria...how with pride and pleasure they said that there wasn't a spot on the face of the earth but what the sun would be shining on an unfurled flag of Britain at any hour of the day. It was a good era. Then, to mark the Jubilee, the representatives from all the Commonwealth of Nations came to England to give the Queen the homage in England's great hour. Rudyard Kipling, in the spirit of the psalmist who wrote these words, takes civilized

man to task:

"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine;
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget - - lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart,
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget - - lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget - - lest we forget!

It's a grand and good thing to be able to name the blessings that have come from God's outstretched hand. It's a far more precious thing to be able to name the blessings that have been channeled into the lives of other people because of what's come our way. You want to put yourself into a situation where you can't forget how good God's been to you? The best possible of all ways is to keep yourself forever busy, passing the blessing along.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHO LISTENS TO PROPHETS?"

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The text, like so many things related to Jesus Christ, is revealing indeed. It's from the Gospel for the Day, the 41st and the 42nd verses of the 19th chapter of Luke:

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

Anyone who is fortunate enough to do any kind of traveling is always happy in the thought if when the journey is over, he's either kept a diary or he has a collection or a series of photographs or slides to which he can turn, by which to refresh his memory. And then on occasion, when he looks at those pictures or shows the slides, it all comes back to him. And it could well be that if your experience is the experience that I've come to know, that when those slides, those pictures, are looked at again, there may be one here and one there on which your eyes will remain fastened a bit longer than any of the others - - a picture here and a picture there that has unusual significance.

So it is when I look at those pictures first taken when I went to Rome. So many things that I wanted to see in that city referred to as the "eternal city;" and I went snapping pictures here and snapping pictures there constantly. Now when I look at them there's one that stays on the screen a little bit longer than any of the others. You're mistaken, my friend - - it's not the Coliseum....nor is it the church, St. Paul's Out-

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side the Walls....or the Church of St. John the Lateran. It isn't the picture of a viaduct, it isn't a picture of the Forum as such....nor is it the slide of St. Peter's, remembered by many people as the most majestic of all cathedrals. I'll tell you what it is - - it's the Arch of Titus, there not far away from other things you'll find in the Palatine. And I'll tell you why I remember it especially, for when I saw it for the first time it occurred to me, in no uncertain manner, how steeped in history the Christian faith actually is. So often we forget that Jesus Christ did identify Himself with His day, with His people, and spoke out against the crimes of His civilization.

Let me now fill you in with the details. When I first saw the Arch of Titus I remembered a particular page in the Bible; and the page in the Bible happens to be the portion of Scripture which serves as the Gospel lesson for this day - - a most remarkable period in the life of Jesus Christ. It was His last week here on earth. He was headed toward Jerusalem, the last time He would ever visit the city. And as He came to Jerusalem and He looked upon it, at a particular turn in the road, He saw it in all its beauty, in all its splendor, surely in all of its glory, and reflecting the sun's rays from the dome of the Temple, He caught something of grandeur. But His reaction was a sorrowful reaction. He immediately began to cry.

You don't always think of Jesus Christ with tears in His eyes, do you? You seem to think that He was above that, that He had so great control of His emotions. But Jesus Christ was not crying for Himself. He was crying for that city, He was crying for that people, He was crying for that civilization.

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It's so easy for us to keep Jesus Christ only in the role of the Saviour. We've also got to remember that He's cast in the role of the judge as well. While He was an itinerant preacher, He was also the prophet, and every now and then when He spoke prophetically it was a note of doom and death and devastation that He struck. That's precisely what was happening in this moment in His life, when seeing the city He began to cry. And He made a prediction, a prediction that came true forty years later. Oh, you can read the prophetic utterance for yourself -- it's the Gospel for today -- it could well be a salutary thing for you to read it repeatedly. He said something about the city being leveled to the ground....

....He implied that the destruction would be so total that you wouldn't even find two stones stuck together
....He indicated that when it was all over, it would be like a plowed field.

Forty years after He spoke these words, the prediction came true. He was a prophet. Now, if you want a title for this sermon, why don't you try this one for size: "Who Listens to Prophets?"

They did not pay attention to Him. And that made His sorrow even greater, because from that moment on Jesus Christ would be dealing with the "might-have-been." There's a line from Rosetti that goes like this: " -- of all the words the saddest, it might have been.".....too late...

.....no more. In 70 A.D. the Emperor of Rome sent his son Titus with orders to lay Jerusalem level with the ground. There's where you get my rich feeling for this Arch of Titus, because Titus obeyed the order. He destroyed the city. When he came back, marching victoriously into Rome, there was a great procession, and they brought the spoils of

conquest, and they brought the tokens of humiliation of a people destroyed. And after the procession had taken place, they said, we're going to remember this. That's why they erected that Arch of Titus.

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As you stand there, you have someone who can interpret for you what's inscribed in the arch, and you look closely enough, you'll see representations from that procession, from a people humiliated, how they marched into Rome carrying the seven-branched candelabra, how they brought the tokens of the shew bread, used in the Temple, and how they carried the silver trumpets....a people humiliated, a nation destroyed. Oddly enough, the commemorative arch of Titus stands to this very day, a grim reminder of a prophetic utterance come true, by Jesus Christ no less.

Not to be overlooked, as a matter of historical record, little was known, little was said about Jerusalem for two hundred years. The purpose of this sermon, to begin with, is to indelibly mark upon the fabric of your mind the fact that Jesus Christ did live -- that He was an historical figure, that He was identified with history, and that He did speak out against the ills of His day. We are not right in imprisoning Jesus Christ in stained glass, imprisoning Him in a wooden carving, or locating Him only within the shadow of an altar. He is the ever-living one, who is forever cognizant of everything that's happening, and when He speaks, He speaks in judgment, upon us and our way and our time.

Because this is true, then you must ask yourself, suppose, then, Jesus Christ came in our day -- suppose He were to visit any of our great cities of the world -- surely He would come preaching, surely He would come teaching, surely He would come with arms outstretched in love, surely He would

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speak the consoling word to one who would be penitent. But for a people whose culture is materialistic, for a people whose only goal is building greater cities, more glorious temples serving as a monument to man, we can well believe, that looking upon us in that way, He would cry. And the tears of the divine Son of God would be shed for us....

....if we would only know what lies ahead.

Jesus Christ ~~xxix~~ honestly believed that He had an answer. All preaching, to be effective, must be sincere. It is foolhardy for a man to stand up and to bat the air, with no conviction. But Jesus Christ honestly believed if only they would listen to Him, their city might not have been destroyed, the Temple would not have been destroyed.

What was wrong?

Any student of history knows -- any Sunday School scholar knows. To begin with, as far as religion was concerned, they put a ring around it. God was the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. He was the God of a particular people, and their religion became a matter of exclusion. When they thought of God, they thought only in terms of their people. When they thought of God, they thought of their form of worship, their liturgical expression. They idolized the routine by which they approached God, as though in the chanting of certain psalms, as though in the bringing of certain sacrifices, that this was the end....and they brought pleasure to God by the words that they spoke and the motions through which they went! So Jesus Christ pronounces doom upon them as a church, if one may use that figure of speech -- surely upon a people of a particular religion.

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Then He pronounces doom upon them when He thinks of them as a nation, because they were so nationalistic. They had hatred in their hearts toward the Romans; you could almost slice the air of hatred between a Roman and a Jew. Jesus Christ, the personification of peace, the expression of brotherhood, who allows us to believe that God has made of one family all the brothers in the earth, when He could sense what was happening, He began to cry.....because He knew if only they would follow what He was saying, they would not bring this upon themselves.

Edwin Markham once said,

"Why build these cities glorious,
If man unbuilted goes;
In vain we build the building,
Unless the builder also grows."

...the individual had forgotten to grow spiritually...the individual had forgotten to grow with a sensitive concern for the needs of other people.

Now this same Jesus Christ who spoke these words of judgment upon that day -- what might He say to us? He is forever the prophetic personality of God come to earth. Some almost twenty years now, Winifred and I went to Northfield. There we heard a man who had spent a considerable portion of his years in the Far East. It was just before the outbreak of World War #2, and as a prophet he said to all the women in the congregation -- "If only you'd learn to get along without silk stockings, because," he said, "I tell you, if you go on buying silk stockings, one day you'll be sending your sons to die on foreign soil of the Far East. He also said, "If we don't quit sending materiel to people in far-away lands, one day our own sons will die on foreign soil, killed by our own bullets which we have helped to stock. But who listens to prophets? It

was at the time of a booming economy. We heard the Depression was over.
We were glad.

Beloved, ours is a materialistic culture. This is not a pleasant sermon to preach, but for most of us, we spend a great deal of our energy to improve our lot materially, or to better ourselves as a particular group of people.....unmindful of the disadvantaged, unmindful of the ills and the injustices of other folk, so deep-seated is the depravity of human nature.

Whenever you think of Jesus Christ, my friend, do not sell Him short. See Him as He actually is - - the Christ who for our sakes would be moved to tears....because He was forever telling us how to do it differently...

"Believe me," He was always saying to us,

" - - the way of love is better.

"Believe me," He was always saying to us,

" - - the way of brotherhood is superior."

"Believe me," He was always saying to us,

" - - learn to trust one another, to respect

one another."

.....but who listens to prophets?

....we, who are so materialistic.....maybe it's all in the way

we spell profits.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

August 21, 1966

"SAINTS, BEWARE!"

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There's a distinctive Scriptural reference to Jesus Christ that goes something like this: " -- for all the people were very attentive to hear him." Now there are a number of reasons why this was absolutely true. One certainly was that when He spoke, He spoke authoritatively. There was no question in their minds whatsoever after He had said what He felt needed to be said. And when He spoke, He spoke with a freshness. You remember, don't you, what Thomas Carlyle's mother said, pious Scottish woman that she was, speaking of her own church -- she said, "What this church needs more than anything else is a preacher who knows God first-hand." When Jesus stood up to preach, He spoke not as the scribes, but He spoke as one who had authority. That's one reason why the people were very attentive to hear Him. That's the way the Scriptural reference puts it.

Surely this reason must be included, and you ought not to overlook it; every now and then when He spoke, He introduced a surprise element. He ended what He was saying in a way that they didn't quite anticipate, and they didn't quite expect. Today's Gospel lesson is an excellent example. It could be referred to as the parable of the surprise ending, for surely they never expected Jesus to end the story in the precise manner that He did. This Gospel for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity is in reality an introduction, the recital of a story, and a value judgment. Let us keep all three things in mind, will you?

But first, to the story itself. Jesus again was saying "Two men - "

...immediately it got their attention - "Two men - "

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You see, we say no two people are alike, and so at once we're geared, we're poised, we're set for a study in contrast. It's a very natural, very human reaction, that when you meet two people you begin to contrast them, when you visit two different places, you begin to contrast. If done properly, it can be a very good thing; if done improperly, it can be a detrimental thing. But at any rate, He had their ears at once...
..."I'm going to tell you about two men."...and they would prove themselves a study in contrast expertly drawn by the Master-Teller-of-Stories. They were not disappointed - - but they were surprised.

Well now, for the story itself.

Jesus had a way of letting the characters speak for themselves, and they were the ones who drew the contrast. Character # 1: a good man. Contrary to all that comes immediately to your mind, he was a good man. There isn't a member of Saint Luke congregation who wouldn't be pleased to number him on our membership roll - - because of the record that he had established in the name of the church, in the church of his day, that is. Shall I recite the record for you?

....he was a Pharisee. That meant he loved the Scriptures, he spent ever so much of his time poring over them, reading them carefully, becoming so familiar with the mighty acts of God, the record of His dealings with the Children of Israel.

...he was also the kind of man who was always saying to himself, how can we best keep the Law? what does God expect of us? how can we fulfill the obligation that we owe God? This was his primary occupa-

tion, that's the kind of man he was.

...he was also the kind of man who, if the church said do this - -
- - very well, said he, I'll do it, and what is more, I'll
even do more than they ask me to do.

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I can well see him as a member of this congregation, if you please, reading SAINT LUKE MESSENGER - - he reads it carefully, one announcement after another, and as he reads the announcements he says, this is God's invitation to me to participate, this is God's invitation to me to identify....
.....and so he would!

.....this was the kind of man he was.

.....whenever a service was being held, he was the type of man who would say, this is an obligation upon me to respond, this is God speaking to me. The Scriptures remind us, incidentally, that whenever the feast would be celebrated, he never failed to bring God the honor and glory due His name.

...the church in that day expected every member to tithe, that is, to tithe the increase from the fields. If he gathered fifty bushels of wheat, he was expected to give five to the church, and the church sold them and then allowed the program of the Kingdom to prosper because of what the man had brought with the five bushels of wheat. This man, mark you, said, I'll not only tithe the increase of my fields - - I'll give a tenth of everything that I have!

That's the kind of man he was - who established a truly enviable record. Jesus spelled it out magnificently - - he was a good man, with a good record - - the kind of man you refer to with a measure of grati-

fication and pride if he were a fellow member of yours in this congregation, on the basis of his record.

Then Jesus allowed the other character to speak for himself. Shall I tell you in plain, unvarnished language? The other character was a rascal. Do you know what he had done? When the Romans came in as the occupying authority, he sold out to them. He said, "I'll be your agent. I'll collect taxes for you."

....and because of a very strange arrangement that they had, the tax collector, mark you, set the tariff - - he determined what the traffic would carry. But he was only expected to return a certain portion, which meant over all that that he collected he could keep for himself!

He turned against his own people, a rather rare thing indeed for any people whose solidarity is as precious as the Jewish people's.

In order to spell this out in all the rigid fashion that really becomes it, why don't you deal with something that you can't possible think as ever happening. But suppose some strange trick of fate would occur, and America was occupied, and then somebody that you knew sold himself out to the occupying power, and said "I will be your agent against my fellow citizens."

That's the kind of man this publican was.

Not only that, when he came to pray, there wasn't a single good thing that could appear on his record....he couldn't think of any single good thing that he had ever done!

The study in contrasts: the so-called good man - - and this lament-

able, miserable rascal. That's the story.

Now the surprise ending and the value judgment.

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Jesus very quickly, immediately He said to them, "But I tell you, this man (referring to the rascal) goes down to his house justified rather than the other." And I know exactly what you're thinking. If you could do it, you would argue with Jesus Christ. It's only your respect for Him that keeps you from doing it.

You would be prone to say, "Unfair, Jesus - - unfair! How dare you, Jesus Christ, in all justice, give credit to a man who has no record of goodness? - - how dare you indicate condemnation against a man whose record is good? Jesus, you speak unfairly! - and your value judgment is unjust."

Then as you would be inclined to argue with Him, you'd also say, "Not only unfair, Jesus, to tell the story like that, and to give the value judgment that you do - - it's unwise! What will happen to us if people then take their pitch from the story that you've just told? - - what will happen to our morality? - - what will happen to our behavior pattern? - - what kind of society will we have, if those who try to do good are discredited, and rascals get haloes?"

But you're not forgetting two things, are you? At the very beginning it was said that the Gospel lesson deals with three things: the introduction....the story itself.....the value judgment. Jesus Christ does not trust our reaction. That's why He offered the value judgment. Not everyone is in a position where he can make a value

judgment. There are some things that God Himself has reserved to Himself.

Let me give you a very simple illustration: while vacationing back home those few weeks in July I read in the daily paper about the battle waging in City Council, the battle waging in the County government, the battle waging in the Water Authority -- it's all become a kind of political see-saw of an issue that's been back and forth seventeen years.....will Williamsport introduce fluoridation into its water supply, or won't it? There are people who have been exploiting the issue, and there are those who plead for a referendum, you see -- let the public decide.

Then it was brought to light (whether you can trust it or respect it or not, this I cannot say) -- but it was brought to light that somewhere in their governmental files up there, in their official document, it's a matter of record that the public will not decide on health matters, that if a thing can be proven to be a matter that affects the health of the community, then the judgment must be made by those best qualified to make the judgment.

Most of us who would have heard Jesus tell this story would not have given the value judgment that Jesus gave, which simply implied that in the reading of any issue in life, we are first constrained to tune our ears to Jesus Christ, as to His interpretation, as to His value judgment. Jesus had a reason for telling the story, and He gave that in the introduction which Luke records:

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others -- "

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Let there be no misunderstanding, Jesus is not pleading for a man to offer up a miserable record -- Jesus delights in those who love His law and who seek to live by it. Jesus becomes forever impatient with those who waste their years. But Jesus was not talking about a man's record; He was talking about a man's relationship, He was talking about a man's attitude. We must never lose sight of this.

Take the Pharisee again....what was his attitude toward God? If we can read the record aright, his attitude was that God was someone to whom he could tell how good he was, God was simply a listening post for the recital of a man's virtues. What can God do for a man who has already arrived? What can God do for a man who has no faults? What can God do for a man who has no need for Him? This is clearly spelled out in what the Pharisee sees about himself and of himself.

And so Jesus takes issue with the man on the basis of his attitude toward God. Does He not take issue with the man on the basis of his attitude toward his fellow man? He looked upon this rascal in a censorious manner, appraised himself at the expense of another man -- he was good, by contrast.

Jesus Christ is talking about attitude -- the attitude that a man may have toward God, the attitude that a man might have toward his fellow man. A man is danned by his attitude. You see, this is always the frightening thing. In conversation and encounter with one personality after another, we do have a way of revealing ourselves. Let a man talk long enough and he'll paint a picture of his heart for you, granted you're willing to read it fairly and objectively.

This sermon could be titled, if you wish, "Saints, Beware!" -- for He told it "to certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others -- ."

The sermon could also be titled, "The Peril of Goodness". We run a risk, you see, not only when we become evil, but we become a spiritual risk when we begin to improve; and the man was perfectly right when he said to his pastor, "Pastor, pray harder for me, because I am improving in my spiritual life.....don't ever allow me to reach the place where I become proud of my goodness."

You never thought of it that way? I tell you, the man who begins to show off his halo, and to finger it and to constantly adjust it, -- it may one day slip from his hands, and even cause him to trip over it -- at the very gate of Heaven.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHERE FAITH BOGS DOWN"

The sermon is based upon the Gospel for the Day. It's the 32nd verse of the 7th chapter of Mark:

"And they bring unto him one that was deaf,
and had an impediment in his speech; and
they beseech him to put his hand upon him."

If you're looking for a title for the sermon, perhaps it would be well to settle, once you've heard the sermon preached, for this ascription: "When Faith Bogs Down."

Needless to say, all Scripture ought to be read very, very carefully. We cannot afford to always trust our first impressions, profitable as they themselves may be. But there are certain details that at first we might overlook, yet, as a detail, remains significant. Perhaps you can catch it at once - a very subtle thing, a detail, in the reading of the text - "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him."

But for the moment at least, let us consider the historical background of the text - how this thing happened to take place. Jesus was traveling a circuitous route. He was not returning to Galilee directly. Presumably He had His reasons. It's been suggested that, for one reason, He had discovered, sad to relate as it is, but there was an element of hostility that was rising against Him, there were those who could not appreciate what He was trying to do. So, for a brief respite, He takes this circuitous route....a time perhaps which serves as a breathing space,

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because, as God, He must never lose His perspective, He must always keep His eye on the campaign which He came to wage, He must never lose sight of the ultimate objective which brought Him to earth. Even though there may be temporarily this wave of hostility, He found it necessary to return, taking the circuitous route that gives Him a pause. Scholars lead us to believe that this is why you can read the introduction to this Gospel lesson for the day the way you do.

Then there are those who offer this conjecture -- that He took the circuitous route because He needed time not only for Himself, but He needed time to be with His disciples. Human as they were, in all likelihood they were beginning to complain. While they may not have used the term that's so common among us these days -- "a breakdown of communication" -- yet invariably that's what they must have felt. For life no longer for them was the relaxed pace. The tempo of the preaching ministry had picked up, more and more people were being touched, and the whole outreach was becoming wider and wider, and their Lord and their Master was ever so busy with the demands placed upon Him. The other days they remembered how they went at a more leisurely stride....He seemed to have time to talk with them....He seemed to have time to lay bare His soul, that they would understand, every one of them, exactly what was happening, why it was happening the way it was. But now the pace was so terrific that He knew something of their unrest, their unsettlement. And the scholar who proposes that this conjecture is not to be overlooked surely has something to say to us. So Jesus saw fit to take this brief respite on His way back to Galilee.

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But lo and behold, earnestly as He desired it, the pressing needs of humanity came in upon Him. It just wasn't to be. Things again would never be as quiet as they were. There would always be the clamor, of the miserable, the afflicted....their need would have to be met. Against this background, you see, they brought to Him the man afflicted, the man who could not hear, the man who could not speak.

Now as you read the text, you will note that they simply brought him to Jesus and put him in front of Him. Maybe one can say ever so quickly, even though it was an intrusion in his hopefully desired privacy, yet it must have been refreshing to Him to discover that when these people came, they were people who had complete confidence in Him, and trust. They would never have brought the miserable one to Jesus if they did not believe that He was able to heal; they would never have brought their affliction if they did not trust Jesus Christ, that He could help. What a refreshing thing this must have been to Jesus Christ, against the shadow of a darkened sky of hostility. So they brought this man to Jesus Christ.

There's nothing in the text that leads us to believe that they came with any element of doubt.....nothing that leads us to believe that they said, "Jesus, we're not so sure that you can do this, but we're willing to try." They didn't talk like that.....

....they didn't say, "Jesus, it could be that you maintain a schedule -- Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for the performing of miracles, and this isn't the miracle-working day, but if you don't mind, we've come just the same, thinking that maybe you would."

No reading of the text allows you to put it that way at all. The reading of

the text says "they brought the man, and they put him in front of Jesus Christ." What a tonic to His soul, what a boon to His spirit, to know that here was a handful who believed and trusted.

To the credit of these people, they believed that Jesus Christ could work the miracle. To the credit of these people, when you look at them now, when they came to Jesus Christ they came quite unselfishly, they weren't there to talk about themselves. They were there to talk about the need of somebody else.

It seems to me there are two things always pleasing in the sight of God, aside from our cry for pardon, which is the most wonderful thing that the ears of Jesus Christ ever hear....but there are two things, it seems to me, that are pleasing to God: one, that we should believe in Him; secondly, that when we come into His presence, we come quite unselfishly, asking for a cup of mercies that overflows into the needs of the lives of other people.

Well now, you see, all of this is commendatory. Here is a grand and a good expression of faith -- they came bringing to Jesus Christ the need of an afflicted man, and they honestly believed that Jesus Christ was able to work the miracle. They did not doubt His capability, nor were they inclined to doubt His willingness.

But the careful reading of the text introduces something that may speak to your condition, as I know it speaks to mine -- careful reading of the text, now --

"And they bring unto him one that was deaf,
and had an impediment in his speech; and
they beseech him to put his hand upon him."

You can very properly read the text with this understanding, that they

brought a man to Jesus Christ in faith, believing that Christ would perform the miracle.....and at the same time, they presumed to tell Jesus Christ how to perform the miracle. And this is where our faith can bog down.

It's one thing to believe that God is able, but it's rank presumption on the part of man to tell God how to do a thing....

"Jesus, here he is. We'll tell you what to do -- put your hand on him."

But any reading of the Scriptural account will introduce you to a truth that Jesus did not always perform His miracles in a uniform pattern. He just doesn't have a blanket-coverage procedure. God in Christ speaks to the need that you and I have individually. Isn't that one reason why we love Him as much as we do? -- that He tailors Himself according to our particular need, or if one should put it properly, He tailors His ministry according to our particular need. This is presumption for you:

"God, it's a miracle you can perform, and we're going to tell you how to do it."

Well, there were times when Jesus Christ stretched forth His hand -- the miracle happened. There were times when He didn't even see the afflicted one -- at some distance from the home where the tragedy had occurred, He had only to speak the word, and the miracle happened. He had a number of different ways by which He worked. This one was somewhat different from any of the others.

To begin with, contrary to their directive, instead of having the miracle take place in their presence, He takes the afflicted man away from

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the company of people and deals with him privately. This is something we must never, never forget. God, to do His healing work, chooses to deal with us individually and personally. This we must always remember, that there must be those moments when there is this uninterrupted contact with God. We dare not shy away from the fact that there must be this personal encounter, this direct confrontation.

Ah, this is not to say that we cannot be ushered into the presence of God on the arms of prayer. With all my heart and soul I believe in intercessory prayer. But there also comes a time when God says, "I must deal directly with the faith of the individual who is to be the recipient of so great blessing." When this is about to happen, God says, "Let me have you by yourself -- alone -- quietly so."

One of the tragic things about our generation is that we haven't quite mastered the art of being alone, and we don't quite know what to do with silence. Was I wrong in believing that some of you might have been thrown off a bit this morning, when in that period immediately preceding the preaching of the sermon there was silence! Ordinarily you heard the notes from the organ, but today -- complete silence. Well if used as it could have been intended, with this confrontation with God directly.

Psychologists tell us, and psychiatrists attest to it, that there are people whose lives could be healed if only they knew what to do with the silence that God allows. It was a grand and noble woman who one day was asked to account for the quality of her faith, and she said, "Early in my life I learned one thing, to pray a very simple prayer, "O God,

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teach me how to be made silent before you." And she said, "So often in my intercession for other people, that's the extent of my prayer! - for someone whose soul hurts, for someone who is hospitalized with a physical affliction - - I always begin by naming them, and say 'O God, teach them to be made silent before you.'"which simply means, to provide the background, the necessary background upon which God Himself can work so well. Well, Jesus ignored the directive of these people who brought the afflicted one. Instead of healing the man immediately in their presence, He takes him away, and deals with him personally and directly.

Then, instead of simply putting His hand upon him, Jesus now coming down to the level of the man who could not hear or speak uses a kind of sign language - - He takes that divine finger of His and sticks it into the ear of the man who could not hear, much as to say " - the very power of God, from Heaven above, is being channeled through me into your soul."

The man who could not speak.....Jesus Christ spits - -

...it was a common practice in those days, perhaps saliva had medicinal or healing qualities, at least it was employed by many holy men....

...and Jesus Christ takes His own saliva and puts it to the lips of the man who could not speak, as much as to say " - divine power is yours....
...you shall be made to speak, as a gift from God."

You see, the people who brought the man to Jesus Christ didn't have any of this in mind at all. They simply wanted a miracle, but Jesus Christ deals with individuals. He doesn't have divine counters and shelves where He simply pulls down a miracle and says, "Take it and be on your way."

The wonder of our God, that He stoops to our level, and always individually, and always personally.

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But before one concludes with this aspect of the truth, notice another detail which you might have overlooked. Before the miracle was finally consummated, Jesus Christ sighed, as much as to indicate "Is it worth it?" The offer of a gift always precludes the possibility of mis-use and abuse. Men have ears, they can be deaf to the truth. Men have lips by which to speak -- they may not always speak in love. Jesus knew this. Whenever I read the giving of sight to the blind Bartimaeus, and I sometimes ask myself the question: did the day ever come when Bartimaeus wished that he had been blind? -- for having been given sight, now he could read hatred in the eyes of people.....not always love, not always patience. You see, here's a detail, too, that's not to be overlooked -- even in bestowing such a wonderful gift Jesus Christ sighed! -- "Will he use it aright?"

Now go back to what was said earlier. Maybe for most of us the greater problem doesn't lie in the fact that we doubt God's capability to act. May I lay bare my soul to you at this point? I have never believed for a single minute anything other than what God is able.....but every now and then, my faith bogs down when I presume to believe that He will act in the way that I figured out that He ought to act! God who is wisdom, God who is love, God who is truth, still says to us, "Believe me, and let me do it my way."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S FELLOW WORKMEN"

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The text, it's the 9th verse of the 3rd chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:

"For we are fellow workmen for God - - "

We've become accustomed in recent years, that on this, the first Sunday in September, that there should be introduced the first in a series of sermons especially designed to be preached from this pulpit from September through June of the following year. And as you may remember, each series has a particular theme. This year the theme will be "Names Given to the Early Christians."

There are those who say that present-day Christianity is a far cry from what it was at the very beginning. If this should be true, then the only way we might ever again recapture something of the spirit of the early Church might be to take a good long look at the people, that is, their mind and their spirit and their commitment, who made up membership in the Family of God when the Church was young. Perhaps there is no better way to do this than to give oneself to a study of their names.

Names are important. Shakespeare was only half right when he said, "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."....but who among us cannot admit quickly that a rose is always something more than fragrance? For people who lived in the Near East, there was a high priority put upon the giving of a name. For when a name was given, hopefully they believed that the person carrying that name from that day onward would em-

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body all the things that the name stood for; and if he was given the name, he might have been given it because he had already indicated in his own life and spirit the meaning of the name. There is no better proof for this, of course, those of you who love the Bible, in the giving of the name to Jesus, so very, very significant - - "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The name Jesus means "one who saves."

The early Church was known by a number of different names, that is, the people who made up membership in the early Church. Some of them were names given to them by the world. Some of them were names given them by fellow believers. Some of the names were given specifically by Jesus Christ. And what a profitable time it ought to be for us when we consider that section in the series - - the names chosen by Jesus Christ specifically for His disciples.

The name on this Sunday: "God's Fellow Workmen." Look at the text, just by itself....it stands there quite innocent-like....Paul's statement to a group of Christians in a particular place called Corinth.....

"For we are fellow workmen for God"
...quite innocent-like by itself. But I tell you, had you been there, had you caught something in the eyes of the Apostle Paul and detected that unmistakable note in his voice, you would say to yourself, it's a rebuke! When this magnificent title was first used by the Apostle Paul, it was spoken by a man who was rebuking Christians - - calling them to their essential task, when they had forgotten it.

Paul, the itinerant tent-mender, was always eager to get reports from the congregations that had been established. And whenever he went to be identified with a parish or a new church, he was eager to put his finger

upon its spiritual pulse-beat. What he ascertained, now, about the church at Corinth, wasn't very pleasant. It was a congregation that was split in four different directions. He was sorely grieved by this factiousness, for the community of believers was never meant to be divided. This dissention annoyed him, irritated him, and grieved him.

What had happened? - well a simple observation will bring to one's mind what had happened. The Christians had simply brought into their church the patterns and behavior of the world. Historians and Bible scholars tell us that in Corinth people delighted in talking - - every man wanted his own little soap-box. People were thrilled by the sound of their own voices. And when they were engaged in controversy, it wasn't because they were adherents to a particular item of truth; it was simply because they wanted to exalt their own personal opinions in the matter. That was the kind of thing that was happening in Corinth.

And then to compound the trouble, they brought personalities into the picture. And one segment said, "We're going to do it Paul's way... he's our leader. Our loyalty to the Kingdom is going to be expressed through our attachment to him." And they were permitting themselves to think that the Kingdom would rise or fall according to Paul's status.

...and there were people who thought the same thing about Peter. They talked and thought in the same manner.

....there were people who did the same thing when they thought of Apollos.

....and then, as you would have it, there was a group said, with a ridiculous measure of pride, "We're followers of Christ."

So Paul simply says, "Why, we're all workmen together - - we are

God's fellow workmen." He wanted them to understand that, as far as he was concerned, and if he knew Peter aright, if he knew Apollos aright, there wasn't a single one of them who wanted to have personal loyalty attached to them, and so he took the members of the congregation to task for doing this sort of thing. He who wrote that magnificent hymn of love, his 13th chapter in his First Letter to the Corinthians, is also the man who could sternly rebuke believers in the Lord Jesus Christ for becoming factious, and giving themselves to parties, and being part of a dissension.

My friend Dr. Carlson, when we were on that mission together, would every now and then share with me precious insights out of his own life, the problems that came up in the life of this man who had been God's servant so magnificently for some forty years. And he said, occasionally, when he would be confronted by a member of the parish who couldn't quite understand, and whose spirit became an alienating factor in the congregation.....he would simply look the man straight in the eye and say (whether it was with a measure of disgust or not, I'm not quite certain)....but he would look the man straight in the eye and say, "How do you get that way?" If one would permit himself to use the colloquialisms and the jargon which might in our day best express what Paul was saying to these people, he might have said -- "What ails you people?" -- "have you lost your perspective?" Now all of this is behind this very simple statement, "We are fellow workmen for God."

Now I should tell you that there is more than one translation of this text. What do you do when you come to a translation that can be understood in two different ways at least, both of them quite valid? One translation is "We are fellow workmen for God"another translation "We are fellow

workmen with God." May I suggest to you that you take both to heart, because each in its own way can speak to our deep need. As far as Paul was concerned, I have reason to believe that for the moment at least, he was preferring this one, "We are fellow workmen for God."

"those of you who say you belong to Cephas,
those of you who say you belong to Paul, those of you who
say you belong to Apollos - - - God is your Master - - -
the Kingdom belongs to God!"

You don't commit yourself to any particular person. The church does not begin and end with a staff member. The church does not begin and end with the pastor. The Kingdom of God does not begin and end with any one particular congregation. One's commitment is to Jesus Christ! The Kingdom is God's! The church is His! This is what Paul was saying to them, "Sure, you're a workman, sure, you're a servant" - - I'm not questioning this at all as far as Paul with his reasoning...

...he never sold Peter short

....he never sold Apollos short

...he acknowledged that in the plan of God, God could use those of diverse gifts, their skills, their talents, and the thing that he looked for, primarily, was commitment to the Head of the Church. So he took them to task - - "You are fellow workmen for God."

Quite recently, you probably read it for yourself, a man who served in government a few administrations ago died. He had made quite a mark for himself. There were those who remembered him as always having been ambitious, and they said, "With Howard, Howard always came first." In the

Kingdom of God no single person, called by God to be His servant or His leader, ever comes first. Only the Head of the Church comes first. And this is the proper orientation that all of us always must have, and that's what Paul was saying, "You are a workman for God."

Can you honestly believe this, that God allows this to happen? There are few things, very few indeed, that God sees fit to do in this world all by Himself. And this is why we're somewhat bowled over when we come to the understanding of the other translation, "You are fellow workmen with God." Do you mean to tell me that God sees fit to use us? A member of this congregation for whom I have unusually high regard, especially for his appreciation that he has for Kierkegaard, keeps quoting for me, "Christ carves out of rotten wood, and sometimes rides a lame horse." You know what that means, of course you do - - unworthy as we are, and in the face of all our imperfections, God still gets His work done. This is the striking thing, the tremendous truth, that you and I can be workmen with God, that you and I can be yoked with Christ!

So one comes to the second translation - "We are fellow workmen for God"....."we are fellow workmen with God." Can you think of anything that God can't get done all by Himself, if He sees fit? Yet seldom, if ever, does this happen. You and I shy away from the thought that he could be dependent upon us....yet the fact remains that ever so often He uses us either as tools or as partners, in order that He can accomplish what He wants done here on this earth.

Let it be understood clearly, all of the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus Christ were far from being fully-fashioned saints. They had feet of clay, and they wore tilted haloes. Yet He saw fit to use them in bringing

in the Kingdom. Doesn't that mean that as far as you and I are concerned, we must always have this healthy regard for one another who are called to do God's service? Impatience is one of the things that the Devil delights in finding in believers, the impatience that we have with one another.

There was a pastor who resigned as he came to his retirement years. And on the day of his retirement somebody said, "Speak the good word for the day to us, Pastor - - out of the harvest of the years, what's the word to be spoken?" And as he looked to this congregation that he had shepherded for more than twenty years - - "Never run out of love for one another"....which is another way of saying, always be patient. If God is patient with you, so you ought to be patient with somebody else. Says the Apostle Paul in that sturdy reminder, "We are not only workmen for God, we are workmen with God " ...and if God can see fit to use us, then our primary concern would be with the person's commitment to Jesus Christ.

Now this is the difference between a tool and a partner. The man who reaches in the direction of his bench for a tool guides and directs what's happening with that tool in his hand. The tool is simply what the master-mind and the guiding hand makes it. God needs us as tools.

He also says, you can be a partner with me, you can be a fellow workman. And perhaps God never smiled quite as broadly upon us, except in the act of Redemption, as when He said, "Come, work with me, be my partner." If you want a tonic for your soul, my friend, allow your commitment to be so genuine that you can allow yourself to believe that you're God's partner! With all the signs of deterioration about you, God is at work, building His brave new world. Are you with it? Are you His partner? Are you His fellow workman?

When I was a patient in the hospital a number of years ago, I knew a measure of delight in engaging those who ministered to me in conversation. There was the night nurse. She had grown up in the country, and she recalled for me how they were building their new church, and how when they were laying the foundation she went and she gathered field stones, put them in a pile, and then when they were pouring the concrete into the ditch for the footing, she threw the stones in. And the foreman impatiently came and was about to chase her away...and the pastor said, "No - - let Sara stay. Sara wants to help build this church." Part of the love that Sara has for the church to this very day is reflected by that instant.

God is building His church. God is building, bringing in His Kingdom. You're His partner, aren't you? Aside from the stamp of the redeemed placed upon your brow, there's nothing nobler that can ever be said of a single soul. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

THIS, O GOD, of course is not the first prayer that we've offered to Thee in the course of this day. Were there not waking thoughts of Thee, waking thoughts of gratitude, for the gift of sleep, for the gift of a new day?

Were there not thoughts of gratitude, O God, to Thee, for the possibility of marking the path that leads to a place of prayer, for the opportunity to lift one's voice in praise with a company of believers?

Were there not waking thoughts of gratitude that on this day we could be found within the assembly of those who delight in seeking Thy precept, then turning their back upon an altar, would walk into the world in truth and in love.

O GOD, even now we turn to Thee, asking Thee to make acceptable the worship that we have offered from a cleansed heart, and from a mind given solely to Thee.

O GOD, within this assembly of believers there are the lonely, the discouraged, the heavily-burdened. There are those for whom frustration makes life a path of fear. There are those, O God, who, in their bewilderment, do not reflect Thy grace and Thy truth. There are those, O God, numbered within this company of believers, who have found a new joy, for whom there is such a thing as a spring in one's step, there is a measure of new commitment.

BEHOLD US, then, O God, this company of people, in need of Thy continued grace and strength. Deal graciously with us.

O GOD, bless our congregation as we begin a new chapter. Bless those who come to us for the first time with heart and hand made capable through their commitment. O God, let there be the baptism of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may go from strength to strength, fulfilling those obligations which Thou hast laid upon us, that unto Thee shall be all honor and glory in a world that has no ending.

OUR FATHER.....

(Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
September 4, 1966)

"DISCIPLES"
(Matthew 10:1)

There's a rather unusual expression in Scripture that's recorded in one of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians. It's a quaint, unconventional way of putting a sublime truth. The reference was made to a group of people, a group of people who had gone to a certain community, lived there for a while, made its mark on the fabric of that society. For want of a better way of putting it, the reference made by the world to that group of people, who, by the way, were people committed to Jesus Christ -- reference was made -- -- "those folks who turned the world upside-down -- they've come here also."

This unconventional expression indicates something that we must never, never forget -- that there was a dynamic quality that characterized the early Christian. No matter where he went, he made a difference, and that difference was felt in the society of which he was part.

Do you suppose it would make any difference to this community if Saint Luke Lutheran Church were to disband?

...do you suppose that as far as the greater metropolitan area would be concerned, that there would be no noticeable difference in our society, if all of our religious groups would no longer exist as a company of people committed to the way of God, and tremendously concerned that that expression should make its impact upon society -- would that make any difference to our community?

...and if you want to be a bit more specific, does it make any difference in the place where you work, on the street where you

live....and in the family circle of which you are definitely a part - - - that you are Christian? Is there anything dynamic about your commitment to Jesus Christ that spells out the word different - - - and that difference always a glorious thing!

There are some people who maintain that the church has run its course. They take all kinds of delight in ridiculing what you and I still cherish. Whatever you may think of such an evaluation, this you and I cannot ignore, that if we are to be vital, if we are to be dynamic, then we must catch something of the spirit, and we ourselves must relate to the world with integrity, compassion and conviction, as they did.

As said last Sunday, when the series of sermons to be preached for the most part from this pulpit between now and next June was introduced, a series based upon a study of the names given to the early Christians, that you and I can well afford to do this.....because in the study of a name we find something by way of identification, something by way of character. A name is important, because a name reveals either what a person is, or what other people think him to be. Shakespeare was only half right when he said, "What's in a name? For a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" - - - but all of us know that a rose is always something more than fragrance.

These early Christians were known by a variety of names.

Sometimes the name was given to them from within their own group - - they chose the name for themselves.

Sometimes the names were given to them by outsiders. The name that you and I cherish above every name was given to us by the world - - that's how the name Christian became an established fact -- by the outside world.

Sometimes the names that they carried were given to them by Jesus Christ himself. That is most certainly true of the name that we consider in today's sermon.....the name disciple.

It's important that we should understand this because this, then, is what Jesus understands us to be, this indicates His relationship to us, this indicates His identification of our role.....the word disciple.

Is it too much to believe that it might have happened like this?

...one day when He was walking down the streets of a Galilean or a

Judean village, He saw certain people....there was a man at a kind of desk, keeping books...

....figuring up what a man's tax would be, how

much tax he could get out of that man, how

he could bleed that man.....and by, exploiting

his station, sometime to benefit by it himself....

...and mark you, one day Jesus Christ saw a man like that, Levi, or

Matthew by name, a rather unpromising sort of person (don't forget to put that into the picture).....

...and He said to him, "Follow me."

We have reason to believe that that tax collector, exploiting his fellow-men, got up from his seat of custom and walked away and followed Jesus Christ.

Dare we believe that it happened as simply as this.....that one day Jesus Christ saw three fishermen, mending their nets, getting ready to go out for the next haul, and He said to them - "Follow me"they left their nets, and followed Him - - dare we believe it happened that way?

But this we must accept, that when He had counted twelve that He had corralled in one way or another, He said to them, "Now you are to be my disciples -- this is what I think of you." Now that's the word He used for the first group....disciples.

What is a disciple? A disciple is a follower; a disciple is a learner. In the following process, he learns. That's exactly what it is. And when Jesus Christ was laying the foundation for the Kingdom, that's exactly the way He began. He didn't ask of any man anything other than this: "Come after me.....Follow me.....Learn!"

He began (and you'll shy away from this)....He began, first of all, with a personal commitment, a willingness to follow after a master, which one day they discovered was not a master, but the Master. He did not begin by first asking them questions in theological doctrine, important as the creedal statements of the Church are.....He did not begin that way. He begins simply by saying, "Will you follow me?"....."Will you come as one who is willing to learn?"

You and I do not fully know all the qualifications that they had. It's a good thing that we don't. We're even shocked, somewhat, when we discover how unpromising some of them were. Within that company of twelve, there was most certainly the impatient, and most certainly the impulsive, and there was always one who was talking all the time....and there was one who presumably said very little, and you'd hardly know that he was in the group. They weren't a very promising lot, for in a crucial moment, after dissension had run its course -- which is always a time of testing....they didn't have much to prove on the credit side of the ledger. These are the ones that He said, "Come,

follow me." And in the recognition of that truth there is encouragement for you and for me, my friend, for Jesus Christ does not first look upon our perfection. He never called any man because he met the qualifications perfectly. He did not call them because they were worthy. He called them, that if they would stay with Him, continue to follow Him -- one day He'd make them worthy to stay!

This is the way He began...."I want you to come after me, to stay with me, to follow....and as you follow, you will learn." It's a sad thing that the word isn't used as much as it once was, the word apprentice. Do some of you remember it? -- when a man went and stood alongside of a master-craftsman, to learn the trade simply by serving as an apprentice...whether he brought a certain skill or not, that was yet to be determined; the important thing was, he brought a willingness to learn, and the willingness to be taught by a master teacher. The Kingdom of God begins this way, by recruiting the candidates for discipleship, the apprentice who is willing to walk alongside of the Master-Teacher.

Well, that's how it all got started, honestly it did. Originally they simply followed Jesus. And that is what the Christian Church must never forget! We are a company of followers. The word that He deliberately chose for them, and us, is disciple, and to be a disciple is to be a follower; and as one follows, he learns. This is why I am not about ever to allow you to forget, and every time a New Members Group is formed in this congregation, this is the point at which we begin...."Saint Luke Church is a company of believers in Jesus Christ, and everything that happens in our life together must become an expression of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Whatever we do, what-

ever we fail to do, must be determined on the basis of our commitment to Jesus Christ." And this could remain the test of tests for us: how closely do I follow Him? how well am I learning from Him?

Now there are three things that yet must be said about discipleship.

The first one is this: one decides to become a disciple. No one ever accidentally, no one ever casually follows Jesus Christ. For a little while you may be attracted by curiosity, but to become a disciple requires decision, and this decision must always be personally made. You can never write off your relationship to Jesus Christ in somebody else's name. There must always be opportunity for intercessory prayer, but that never means that you yourself can stand in the stead for somebody else in the school of discipleship; you can never send anybody else to represent you there -- it's always a personal decision.....

...when Jesus Christ came into the life of Matthew, he had to decide -- "Do I stay where I am, or do I follow Him?"
...the fishermen had to make the decision: "Do we stay where we are, or do we follow?"

I wish I would have brought with me to the pulpit the statement that I read to the meeting of the parents on Wednesday of this past week, when we indicated somehow the basic philosophy, what we're trying to do with young people in this church -- in all that we do, trying to impress upon them this matter of decision.....and I quoted for those parents the statement by Alvin Rogness by which he ends saying that there is no thin line between God and Satan, between good and evil, on which a man can stand and balance himself. Discipleship for Jesus Christ must always be a matter of decision. He himself said, "He who is not with me is against me."

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The second thing that needs to be said about discipleship is this: that it's difficult. An English writer once said that he believed that a church should have a high threshold -- a surprising statement, but what he meant by it was that the standards should always be so high that a man would know that it's with some effort that he becomes a follower of Jesus Christ.

....it's a difficult thing to speak the truth, when it seems expedient not to speak....

....it's a difficult thing to love the unlovely....when people give you to understand that they're building a psychological block --- they never hear what you're trying to speak in truth and in love....but you go on patiently and persistently being faithful to Jesus Christ --- it's extremely difficult...

...so difficult that one day Jesus Christ laid it on the line and said, "If any man wants to come after me, let him understand, there's a cross involved." That's what Jesus said.

And this, too, must also be observed: that discipleship is a matter of decision, and a difficult thing to maintain, and it must always be a daily thing. There's no such thing as on-again off-again discipleship. Jesus Christ is so demanding that He doesn't say, "You can serve me one day a week." You make a mistake, my friend, if somehow you ever permit yourself to believe that you've done your duty by God today, for a whole week, by just being here for an hour. It's a daily matter, and it doesn't allow for absenteeism.

Harry Emerson Fosdick used to tell the story -- perhaps you may remember my telling it to you earlier. It comes out of the atrocities committed in the Near East. She was an Armenian nurse, a Christian, who looked upon her

day's work as an expression of her loyalty to Jesus Christ. Now you know the ideals set up for the medical profession, a doctor, a nurse, that they know only one thing -- if a person is in need, he should be helped. That's the basis of the Hippocratic Oath. As a Christian, this meant ever so much more to her.

....well it so happened that when the Turks came, they did what occupying forces so often easily do -- they exploited the women...persecuted, punished, tormented the men. She saw her own father, she saw her own brothers killed, by a man who took her for his own animal passion. She could never forget that face.

....one night as she was going around the ward with a lantern in hand, she was shocked to discover that the man in the bed was the Turkish captain of this miserable and tragic memory.

Fosdick used to say, the slightest inattention on her part would have meant certain death. There wasn't a thing that she needed to have done...he would have died. But then she remembered --- the follower of Jesus Christ -- she ministered to him. He was restored to health.

As he regained his health and his composure, he recognized her, and knew full well what she had done, and raised the question, "Why have you done this, when you knew what I did to you?" She simply said, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ, and as a follower of Jesus Christ I must love and I must serve."

Now the question is this, suppose she would have said that day, when she saw the Turk, "Dear Jesus, not today!....let me have the day off as far as discipleship is concerned -- let me serve you on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday -- but not on this Friday!" God alone knows all the good that might be done, if it weren't for those who take a day off,

a season off, in their personal discipleship.

There was the dream one time, and in my dream we're standing at the gate of Heaven. The Keeper of the Gate comes and says, "How did you get here?" And I heard a man, with a well-high perfect answer, say, "How did I get here? - - I simply followed Jesus Christ." That means, to be a disciple is to be a disciple until the day you die.....and in being a disciple to the day you die is the surest possible way, the only way, to get to Heaven.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WITNESSES"
(Acts 1:8)

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As previously announced, the sermons for the most part to be preached from this pulpit between now and next June will deal with the study of the names given the early Christians. The names that the early Christians carried were names that they had chosen for themselves, names which Jesus, their Master and their Lord had decided to give to them, or names which the world, observing their demeanor, threw at them, in contempt or in scorn.

It's interesting that the name to be studied today, the name witness, should follow ever so closely, and properly so, the name that was discussed last Sunday morning. Last Sunday we talked about the name disciple. When our Lord was here on earth He gathered together a company of people, and He had a name for them. He said, "I want you to come and to be my disciple." That meant they were to be learners, that meant they were to be followers. This is the way it began. He never called people because they were perfect... ..He never called people because they knew all the answers at the outset. He called them that they might come after Him and learn.

The mark of a saint, my good friend, is never perfection; the mark of a saint is consecration, his commitment to Jesus Christ. Once he decides to follow Jesus Christ it doesn't necessarily mean that he will always walk uprightly, circumspectly. You know how often we stumble, you know how often we fall. It shouldn't be that our graver concern would be whether we will fall or not -- the greater measure of satisfaction should lie, that no matter how

often we may fall, that when we get up we still want to face in the right direction. So Jesus Christ said to these people, as He chose them one by one, "Come after me -- follow me -- learn of me --

-- observe me -- walk in my way."

...if you want to put it this way,

" -- be my apprentice."

This, now, they did for three years. What three years they must have been. Then you know what happened as those three years came to an ending. There was the arrest, there was the crucifixion; and after the crucifixion the resurrection.....and there followed the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. You cherish the thought, don't you, that the people to whom He re-appeared after the terrible thing called crucifixion was over were His disciples -- the ones who had followed most nearly with Him -- they were the ones who gathered the benefit of His appearances.

But when He came back to them, He gave them to understand that He was to return to Heaven. God's plan for His life on earth was being completed. What, now, about the Kingdom? Jesus, of course, has the answer, so He says, "You're going to be my witnesses. I return -- I no longer continue here on earth, but now you go your way, you tell people -- tell people about what's happened to you since you met me." That's the way He could have put it.

So He gave them a new name, not that they were to discard the name disciple.....

...you and I remain followers to the very day we die

...no one ever graduates, in this earth, from the school

of discipleship, and the only way we ever really get to

Heaven is simply because we follow in the footsteps of

Jesus Christ....

...no, it wasn't that the name disciple was to be discarded; it was simply that at this stage of their development they received a new name, or rather, another name -- witness.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it, that God in His grace should see fit to allow the Kingdom to be in our hands! -- that we are the ones to tell the good word -- that we should be the ones who become the instruments by which other people shall come to know about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. I'm not so sure that I would have done what He did. I don't know that my faith in human nature would have been as great.....

....they were the ones, you see, who betrayed. Out of their company there was the betrayer, and all of them denied, and all of them forsook Him and fled...

...and is the Kingdom of God going to go on from this point? through such people? Wonder of wonders, God saw fit to do it that way. And incidentally, if you ever despair and think that the Kingdom isn't traveling fast enough, just remember, it's made up of people, like you, like me. So Jesus Christ said, "You're going to be my witnesses -- you're going to tell the story."

Now, you know what a witness does, don't you? A witness is a person who is willing to take a stand. And when he takes the stand, he simply tells what he knows to be true, his testimony is born out of a personal experience. It remains valid as long as he can deal with something that he actually heard, something that he actually saw, something that he himself actually experienced. You have no right to remain in the witness stand if you cannot say, "This is

what I saw, this is what I heard, this is what I experienced." Testimony, to be valid, cannot be hearsay.

And there is another observation that you ought to remember about the giving of testimony: when a man goes into the witness stand, he doesn't argue. He simply speaks out of his own experience. He may answer questions that are put to him, but he's not to become argumentative. The responsibility of believing is thrust upon somebody else. He simply can tell the story as he knew it. He can only tell where he was, he can only tell what he heard. So Jesus said, now, you go -- go like that.

They, those early Christians, were not cut from the same cloth. They were different. They were different, all right. Different in personality, different in temperament, different in skills, different in gifts. But they had one thing in common: the experience of the fact-of-God in Jesus Christ. Something had happened to them, something had happened in them, so they went their way. And the net result was always the same, despite the variety of their temperaments and personalities -- each one was telling in his own way what had happened in his life since Jesus Christ took over. Now that's the way the Kingdom spread. It began, mind you, with the drawing together of the disciples, then it spread by the disciples going out and telling other people.

Is it possible for you to do this right now: try and picture how it actually occurred....a single soul, going out by himself, just talking to people about Jesus Christ. Can you afford the shock of this? it's one thing for me to stand here before you, with the history of the Church behind me....it's one thing for me, wearing the vestments of the Church, representing the ordained ministry of the Gospel....it's one thing for me to stand here surrounded

by walls majestic, and beautiful and dignified -- somehow or other this buttresses me when I stand and speak to you.....it's also something when I stand there, in front of me is the Good Book -- a hundred and one things on which I can rely when I speak to you the good word of Jesus Christ....

....but when they went out, they had no book

....they had no walls....they had no organization

...it is a simple, single soul who somewhere, somehow, had an experience with Jesus Christ!

Ponder this, my friend, suppose the Kingdom this day and in this age depended upon you, bereft of the printed page, bereft of an organized church, bereft of a Sunday School program.....and the Kingdom of God advanced only as you were able to stand up, out of your own experience, and speak a good word about Jesus Christ.

Maybe it's because we too seldom realize that this is the way the Kingdom goes forward, person-by-person, person-through-person. If you want to stay awake tonight after you'd like to go to sleep, just let this fact go back and forth in front of your mind: last year, the year before that, and the year before that and the year before that and the year before that!...the Maryland Synod, of which this Saint Luke congregation is a constituent part, could not muster up 1% total gain over the preceding year of new souls claimed for Jesus Christ -- less than 1%! At our Synod session this past year this was the haunting question: why? -- and the primary task of the Church is to spread the Good Word.

Oh, it isn't that we can't be excited, it isn't that we are a blase people. I listen to people talking. I know how some housewives can become ex-

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cited over the hair-dresser they've found who can work the right touch. I know how they become almost ecstatic when the recipe they prepared has been served, and with such good results, and they pass it on. It isn't that we can't become excited -- it isn't that we can't speak. Why can't we do as much for Jesus Christ?

The early Church went out to face the world, and they were witnesses. I think it spread this way....

...the maid grooming the hair of her mistress, whispered in her ear about the wonderful Saviour she had discovered in Jesus ChristI think it must have been the man going into the bazaar and buying a piece of brassware from the merchant, and discovering that the merchant was different, his attitude, his attitude toward people, the honest way by which he conducted his business affairs. Not that he necessarily spoke to this customer about Jesus Christ, but the attitude of the man's life -- it was different.

They went out into the world, they witnessed with whatever it was they happened to have, wherever they were, and always to those nearest at hand.

There's no denying the fact that there comes a time when the word has to be spoken. Just as there is a time when the relationship between two people, no matter how wonderful and deep the experience, there comes a time when he must look her in the eye and say, "I love you." There are some words that must be spoken. But witnessing is always a matter over and above the speaking of words. It is the basic integrity of one's life.

Would you permit me to refer to him once more, that man Ellwood DeLong, whom we've come to love and to respect, now in his 87th year, who designed for

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us the Chapel of the Grateful Heart; whose final touch (he designed this chancel and altar furniture for us some twenty years ago)...now within the next six weeks we'll see the result of his final touch of beauty, in the altar and the chancel. Years ago, out of his commitment to Jesus Christ he had hoped and prayed he could become a preacher, but then he discovered he couldn't speak. So he said, I'll let my hands speak for me." So he did. I wish before he would die -- even at 87 there is still time, I wish he would write a book of the touch of praise to God that he's brought in seemingly countless churches and chapels throughout the United States and Canada.

A man's hands can speak, a man's lips can speak....a man's unconscious influence can speak. It seems invariably at this time of the year when I think of students going off to college campuses for the first time, I shudder when I recognize the fact that many of them will leave their religion at home. It's not easy to take your religion to some college campuses, and you won't get much encouragement on some college campuses. Joseph Forte Newton once told us, in Gettysburg, how a youngster went off from home, a home in which he had been brought up to respect God, the Scriptures, the Christian life. But after he was on the campus for a while, especially when he became engaged in scientific study of things, his appreciation for God seemed to get less and less and less....and he thought that maybe his parents had an out-moded concept of the universe, and of God, and he was about to scrap it. But he had made a promise to his parents, and maybe out of respect to them he did keep going to church.

But one Sunday he said, "This is the last time" - and in that frame of mind he went off to early Communion in the Episcopal church. When he attended

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that service at eight o'clock - - just before the service began, someone came (very few being present), but somebody came and went three seats in front of him, genuflected, made the sign of the cross, very reverently prepared for worship. And the student discovered that this man, at eight o'clock in the morning, with the utmost of reverence, indicating a spiritual sensitivity - - was none other than his chemistry professor! And the student, on what might have been his last Sunday in church, reasoned to himself...

"...if that man, with all of his degrees, with all of his learning, can still come to church, and kneel, and humble himself, with a thirst for God's truth and the Sacrament - - - "

...well, you can finish the story for yourself. And all by a man who never looked another man straight in the eye and said "I want to talk to you about Jesus Christ" - - important as that is - - yet by the very integrity of an unconscious influence, witnessed for Jesus Christ.

There is one thing I can tell you about life, my friend, if I can't tell you anything else: your life counts. There is always the cross-fertilization of mind and spirit, and in a certain sense you and I become the sum total of all the influences in life to which we have been exposed., of all the people that you may touch, directly or indirectly. God in His wisdom, God in His grace has seen fit to say, "Through you, someone else may learn of me."

....by the way, that's how you found out, didn't you?

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(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
Sunday, September 18, 1966

GOD, FATHER of All Men, hear the prayer, if it please Thee, of these thy believing children. Our approach to Thee, O God, is at Thy pleasure since we have not merited in our own name or record direct access to your nearness.

We stand in need of strength. We are the weak ones.

We stand in need of wisdom. We are the foolish ones.

We stand in need of patience. We are the easily irritated and annoyed.

We stand in need of cleansing. We are the soiled ones since we have trafficked in the ways of the world.

Re-make us in this hour, that transformed by Thy grace we may live for Thee day by day as the more acceptable witnesses.

God of all men, hear our prayer for the disadvantaged and the exploited.

God, who is peace, hear our prayer for those who seek your way.

"SAINTS"

Already in this month of September we've considered three names by which the early Christians were known. That's the theme of the series of sermons to be preached this year in Saint Luke Church. We have discussed such names as Fellow-Workmen.....Disciple.....Witness.....and today the name from which you yourself, wittingly or unwittingly, are prone to shy, the name Saint.

Ah, come now, I've heard you say it, "But I'm no saint, brother!" This is what sometimes people say to their pastor. This is what they say sometimes to one another. This is what they say sometimes as they, strangely, would justify themselves when they deal with people who belong to the world...."I'm no saint, brother."

How foolishly can a man think, how foolishly can a man speak. When the church was young, this was one of the words that was commonly used for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why that man, Apostle Paul, when he went around from community to community, establishing congregations, and then keeping in touch with them by the letters that he wrote.....you can read it for yourself - - how does he begin that letter that he wrote to the Christians in Rome? - - "To those called of God to be saints." How did he begin his letter to those Christians in Corinth? - - "called of God to be saints." In much the same manner he refers to the Christians in Colossae and in Philippi. And when he wrote a letter like that, he wasn't just thinking of a select group of people within the congregation. He was thinking of everybody - - that's the way he used the name - - anyone who had confessed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.....he said, "You're a saint."

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Why do you and I shy away from the word? Maybe it's because, and I say it with charity, the Roman Church has done us a disservice in this respect. Centuries ago, you know, during the Medieval Period, they allowed Christendom to believe that there were two levels of Christian faith, one level was decidedly the religious, the other the secular. And unless you became a priest, a monk or a sister, you could not be entitled to one who was religious, as the classification even to this day remains! And all others who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, unless they were in holy orders, were secular. and wittingly or unwittingly, then, people allowed themselves to believe that you had to be in a very special category to be classified as those who were nearer to Jesus Christ, and because they were nearer to Jesus Christ, they had achieved what the rest of us could never achieve.

And by the same token, when they began this whole process of beatification, canonization, when they even took the word saint and said it belongs to a particular person, and only this person can be so classified -- he had to be someone who while he lived was unusually pious....he had to be someone who, after he died, could be associated with the performance of a miracle. And then after a few hundred years, maybe, the Church would come together in council assembled, and then they'd make known that this was now Saint Benedict....and hereafter this would be Saint Teresa.....and hereafter this would be Saint Boniface....

....but only if you, you see, of all the billions who have ever constituted membership in the Christian faith, could ever classify for something like that.

And so you and I come along in this, our day, and say, " -- but I'm no

saint, brother" - - meaning that sainthood is so far beyond our reach that it's impossible for any one of us to be able to achieve it. Well, there's something to be said for a high standard, there's something to be said for the realization of the truth that there are some people, perhaps, who do have a certain quality, a blessedness, that may be beyond your attainment and mine.

Well, if you say you're no saint because you believe that it's beyond your attainment, that's one thing....but if you say you're no saint because you really don't want to become one, that's another thing! Who was it who wrote a book some years ago, when she dealt with the Lord's Prayer, she came to the petition "Thy kingdom come" - - and the gist of what she had to say came with the subtitle "Thy Kingdom Come - - But Not Now!"....."Thy Will Be Done - - But Not By Me - Today!" Maybe this is the crux of the matter for most of us: we really don't want to become much better spiritually.

It isn't that we can't achieve perfection. The indictment against many of us is this: we enjoy our sinning! We nurse our prejudices, we build certain fortresses around our psychological blocks. We're not so sure that we want to say charitable things about other people. We're not inclined to allowing our hearts and minds to be ruled by God! This has been the problem from the very beginning - - man is by nature willful.....and God is willful, too! So we do battle against God, and we know a measure of comfort in defending our particular point of view. This could be the other side of the coin - - that we really don't want to become much better than we are.

The shock of a man's life could come to him when you take away his prejudice. What does he have left? The tragedy in many people's lives is that because they have maintained the stand, they're not about to change it! Across

the river from the parish that I served in Pennsylvania was a neighboring, a sister Lutheran church. And the pastor one time confided to me....

(....and I don't know that many of you can fully understand

this, how a pastor can bleed for his people, when by the

grace of God he recognizes the folly of their stubbornness.....)

...how Sunday after Sunday -- one man came to church and sat on this side, and another man came to church and sat on this side, and they never spoke to each other. They deliberately refused to recognize the presence of one another, and deliberately ignored the fact that the other was there! The pastor said, "As I pray for both, I know full well that the most difficult thing for any one of them is to simply give up and to acknowledge the manner in which he has entrenched himself."

This is God's problem with us. We don't want to become better spiritually. We want to become better in a lot of other ways -- in prestige, perhaps, in influence, perhaps -- but not spiritually. And yet, I say to you, this is what the Christian Church is all about! -- to help you improve spiritually, to help us grow in grace, that day by day we might have a greater measure of patience, we might be willing to become long-suffering.

Now it is true that the Apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians Christians referred to them as saints. But we also note that he very shortly, in the same letter, took them to task for their shortcomings. Does this mean that we cancel-out their haloes? Of course not. But the Apostle Paul was dealing with the fact that within the Christian community there were those who had embraced the Christian faith who had committed themselves to Jesus Christ, and he looked upon their intention as the valid thing.

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When the church was young, it was made up of people whose heart's desire was to become more Christlike -- honestly -- but when they came into the church they brought into the church all of their limitations. And you and I have our limitations. But God doesn't judge us because we're perfect....God judges us on the basis of how much we want to improve. Let me say it again and again, that the mark of the saint is never perfection -- the mark of a saint is consecration, and that simply means that he's always looking in the same direction, and he's looking toward Jesus Christ. He may fail, he may falter, he may stumble....but every time he gets up he keeps looking in the direction of Jesus Christ. This is what the Christian Church is all about, this is why we band together. No man can go for long on the road by himself. He needs the cross-fertilization in Christ of your mind and your spirit. This is why God allows the Christian Church to come into existence, that together, within the church, we might grow.

It's a lamentable thing, and perhaps the most serious indictment that the world has ever placed against us is that the world sees so little of Jesus Christ within the minds and spirits of those who call themselves Christian. Before I took that trip to India I read as much as I could by those who had lived in India, a land where less than 3% are Christian. What does the non-Christian think of the Christian? And one of the most telling statements I read in any book was this: the non-Christian who said to a confessed believer in Christ, "Tell me, what have I to hope for in Jesus Christ -- what assurance do I have that He can do more for me than what He's seemingly done for you?"

Now let us go back to the text. The Apostle Paul kept saying, "called to

be saints." - - being is always in the process of becoming. There is no such thing as a perfect saint. As long as he lives here on this earth you and I remain sinners until the day we die. The mark of a saint is not perfection, it's intention, it's consecration. Sainthood is allowed us, then with the charity of God! God judges us not simply on what we are, but on what, by His grace, we can become!

Why don't you look at it this way....if the Apostle Paul were around today, and suppose he was writing to all the congregations that make up membership in the Maryland Synod. And on Friday of this past week I would get a letter, and he'd ask that I read it from the lectern on this Lord's Day. Suppose he would begin, as he wrote to us, in the same manner as when he wrote to them - - - "To the Christians in Saint Luke Congregation,

Silver Spring, Maryland - - to all who are
called to be saints - - - "

...come now, to whom would he be speaking? Just a handful of people? You're wrong. He'd be speaking to every one of us, if our heart's intention was to walk in the way of Jesus Christ. And that's really what a saint is: a person who tries harder, and who keeps himself open to the grace of God to become more Christ-like.

May I tell you what some of you already know, that one of the things that vexes and irritates and annoys the heart and soul of a pastor, if he's worthy of the name pastor, no matter where he may serve, is to discover that his people can become sidetracked, and give themselves to bickering and quarreling about things that really do not matter in the Kingdom. Whenever a church concentrates upon anything that's less than its spiritual growth and development,

whenever it allows itself to reflect anything less than the love and the patience of God, it gives a victory to the world!

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It always grieves me when people speak disparagingly of other pastors, and I've never allowed myself to know a measure of delight when they speak unkindly of other congregations, because this is so much fuel for the fire of hatred, in the world. "Behold how Christians love one another" is the one thing that the world must respect. So the Apostle Paul, in writing to Christian congregation after congregation, said, "called to be saints -"called to be saints - "....."called to be saints - " - - who are in the process of becoming, reflecting, the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ.

And now I would offer to you a test of tests. Ask yourself the question: am I any more Christlike today than I was a year ago? - - is the indelible stamp of Jesus Christ being seen clearly upon the fabric of my soul? This whole business of the Christian religion is the process of becoming. That's the test - - does what I say about other people reflect the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ?

There are two things to be said about the word saint.

You have to work at it - - honestly you do. You just don't become good casually. How much are you engaged with this business of improving yourself spiritually? There's a verse of Scripture that has measured deeply in my mind. It's a quotation from the Psalms: "I will wash my hands in innocency"and when I read that I thought of a figure of speech, and then I thought of a fact of life. When you and I are out in the world, and we come home at night, or come in at mid-day, one of the first things that some of us want to do is to wash our hands and our faces and our necks, to get rid of some of

grime and the soil of the world to which we have been exposed - - we can't keep it away. I say to you, by the very same token, when you traffic in the world, you're exposed to all kinds of forces of evil, and why not, then, at the end of the day, wash your soul in innocency, and ask for the cleansing touch of the grace of Jesus Christ. Tomorrow and the day after, even today, you'll be exposed to evil. Wash yourself of it with the cleansing grace of God - daily.

And the second thing to be said about this whole business of being a saint; when it's all said and done, while you and I must keep after it, it's never our work. You and I are not in the halo-making business. Haloes are given - - haloes are bestowed upon us. And they're bestowed upon those who want them most. So maybe the test of tests, after it's all said and done:

- - what really is the intention of my heart?

- - do I really want to become more Christ-like?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

In the life of any congregation there are always special intercessions that ought to be offered. We are a Family in God. Just before this service began, one of our teenagers came to me and told me that his grandmother had suffered a massive stroke. She may not live out the course of the day. Let us now pray for those to whom death may draw near.

O THOU, Who art the Lord and Giver of Life, we give Thee thanks for the victory which we have known in Jesus Christ, Who when we end our earthly pilgrimage, opens for us the gate of Heaven. We are grateful for those who minister to this, Thy servant, and we are grateful for those who have trained her, years and years ago, to have unlimited faith in the Lord and Saviour who is Jesus Christ. As we pray for her, we would pray for all to whom death may draw nigh. Amen.

Within the life of this congregation there are those who find it exceedingly difficult to keep up their faith in Jesus Christ, there are always the besetting influences. Let us now pray for those who find it harder than you, perhaps, to remain in the Way.

O GOD, Who never intended that any of us should be able to make it by himself, and when You sent Your Son into the world, He was the Great Wanderer, walking this path and walking that road, and talking with this person and talking with that person, and always His heart's desire was to impart faith and confidence, and to introduce them to the blessed truth that God is able: therefore we pray for any whom we may know, and if perchance it should be oneself, O God, help us to remember the gospel of the second chance, and the gospel of the unfailing grace of God, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

There are those within the life of this congregation whose lives are being deepened spiritually, who have discovered a new joy, and who have again found their place in the Kingdom. For them let us pray.

O GOD, All Life is as a testing. It is not for us to determine what may happen to us. It is only for us, by the Grace of God, to determine what we will do, in any situation in which we may find ourselves. We are grateful, then, for the turn in the road that enables us to see again Thy purpose in our lives, and if it please Thee, through this Family in God. Hear us now in this, our prayer. Forgive each his every sin, and keep before us the hope of Heaven.

O LORD, Support us all the day long of our troublous life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, the fever of life is over, the day's work is done, the busy world is hushed. Then in Thy mercy grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last.

OUR FATHER.....

The text is from the Epistle for the Day. It is the 1st verse of the 4th chapter of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians:

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg
you to walk worthy of the calling to which
you have been called."

In the general parish mailing that came to you very recently you will have found by this time the suggestion that all of us share in Bible reading daily. It's the Fourth Gospel, and the translation that's being put into our hands is that of J. B. Phillips, designed to be read as common, readily understood English. In connection with this booklet, which brings to you the translation, you will find a series of photographs, as contemporary as the world outside your door.

We make a mistake, whenever we think of Scripture, as though it was something confined to a long ago, to a people who lived in a strange land, and many, many miles away. The Gospel is timeless Truth, and belongs to our present day as well as any other generation. This is one reason why it's a salutary thing that when you read the Gospel now, throughout this month of October, you might say to yourself, it belongs to this world, the world of the market-place, the world of pleasure, the world of industry, the world that has in it the common ventures of life.

The Scriptures have come to us, by the grace of God, in and through life itself. These things did occur. Now with this as a prefatory statement, may I suggest that you ask God to give you a sanctified imagination, that you might

be able to picture the real-life situation out of which this Epistle lesson for the day has come to us....."I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you that you live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."that's what a group of Christians one day read when they got a letter from somebody that they loved and respected.

Now try to picture that group of Christians gathered together, there in that town of Ephesus in Asia Minor.....when somebody came into the group of Christians and said, "Guess what! - we've got a letter today! It's from that man, Paul. You've heard a great deal about him."

.....then there was a bit of murmuring within the congregation, people saying to themselves, "Paul? - - Paul? - - I thought he was in jail. Didn't we just hear very recently that he was in prison?"

.....then perhaps somebody else reacts in this way, "Well maybe he's changed his tune now about the Christian faith. When we last knew about him there was a spring in his step, there was no question about his commitment to Jesus Christ....maybe his tune has changed now, since he's behind prison bars."

You know that life can do this to people - - let the story change, let the situation take a turn for the worse, and our whole outlook on life can become embittered, and we can become very easily cynical. So there were those who said to themselves, undoubtedly, "Let's hear what he has to say now, this man in jail."

Well, lo and behold, Paul was one of those people who, when he made his commitment to Jesus Christ, it was a commitment that was going to hold in good stead, come wind or weather, and even though he's being imprisoned because he believed in Jesus Christ, he says, "I beg you to walk worthy of your

calling." He might just as well have added, "It might some day get you where I am, but don't give up the faith."

Paul was the kind of person, also, who believed that once you had made commitment to something or to someone, you should be faithful and obedient. If you belonged within the Christian Church, then you ought to live the kind of life that represents the Christian faith, regardless of what might happen to you. So it's out of this situation, perhaps, that Paul says to these people, "I beg you - - be Christian - - walk worthy of the calling that you have."

As your Pastor I submit to you this morning that it's the most difficult thing in the world to be Christian. We have little patience with those who tell us it's easy. We do believe in the depravity of human nature and we do believe that it's always easier to do evil than to do good - - left by your-self, my friend, without the benefit of the things you have been taught...left by yourself, without making available the grace of God in Christ, we go straight on the road to Hell. It's always easier to do evil than to do good. But Paul says, "Be worthy of the calling that you have - - be Christian."

This sermon comes to you this morning, brief as it may be, for two reasons. First, to recognize the fact that Paul is asking us to do something very, very difficult. For twenty-six years I have been listening in on human hearts, trying to put my finger on the spiritual pulsebeat of souls. If life has taught me anything, it most certainly has taught me that most of us have no idea how hard it is for some people to be good. It's a constant battle to be faithful to Jesus Christ. We are a company of people gathered here right now - - none of us may fully know the battles that are being fought in the name of Jesus

Christ by the person alongside of you, in front of you or behind you. Life makes this kind of demand upon us. But the Apostle Paul, as a good representative of Jesus Christ, doesn't ease us out of the conflict -- he says, "Still be worthy of the name Christ." But it's not easy.

That's why Paul was always trying to tell these Christians in different communities, "Don't let the way of the world creep inside your church. The way of the world is division, strife, enmity -- don't let that happen inside the church. Strive to give the world a mirror of God's love and God's truth."that's what he was always saying to these people.

Then, in this letter from which today's Epistle was taken, he talks about being meek, humble, patient, forbearing one another in love. Let me tell you two things at this particular point. One is this: there was a woman who forgot this admonition of the Apostle Paul. Day by day she found herself becoming less and less Christian, that is, less and less kind, less and less loving, less and less gracious. She had two sons. Of the one son she was unusually critical, seemingly he never did anything that was right. And through her negative attitude, the life of that whole household had a cloud over it. Then one day the son never returned. He was involved in a tragic accident.

....she lived with this for a while. And then, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a miracle took place in her life. She said to herself, "As God gives me our other son, as long as I live, by God's help, I'll think more kindly of him -- I won't look for his faults, I'll look for his good points." That transformed her life, it transformed the life of that whole family circle. But it took some effort, and a tragedy at that.

The other illustration, just as homespun as life itself, is the account

of a woman who got on a train to travel to her destination. And as she traveled she complained about this thing, she complained about that thing. It was a miserable trip. And then she arrived at her destination, much to her surprise, a short journey. She said to the conductor, "If I would have known the journey was going to be as short as it was, I would have tried to enjoy it more."

....life at the most is short, my friend. There is so little time to practice Christian love, so little time. The Apostle Paul says, "Practice it -- live up to your Christian commitment -- every day." Show to the world what a bit of God in your life can really be like. If the world doesn't find it in a Christian, where will the world find it?

Now the second reason for speaking to you like this I now tell you.

Very shortly we'll be coming up to the altar to receive the Sacrament. Again let it be said that we may have no idea what burden the person ahead of you is bringing to the altar. Won't you, while others are receiving the Sacrament, pray for the person who is going to be standing or kneeling where you stood or knelt. There's a member of this congregation who unashamedly admits that she lives for the hour that she spends in this place, for, says she, it is the only hour of peace and purpose that she really has in the week's time, so grievous is the world out of which she comes. Now that this might happen for all of us, the overflowing of God's love in Christ, pray for it as we come to receive the Sacrament.

And what is the Sacrament except Christ coming into us! And this is an absolute essential in the Christian faith, because no man can be good by himself! Christ is the Saviour, who helps us. May so great blessing be vouchsafed to all of us then, so that when we leave this holy place, we may have

in the receiving of the Sacrament received all the wholeness of God in Christ
by which it is possible to live worthy of the high calling which we have in
Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FOOLS"

There are those who maintain that if a man is a fool, he is never more so than when he admits it. The Apostle Paul was that kind of a fool, for we can read in one of the letters that he wrote to Christians in Corinth this thing that he said about himself, and when he said it, he very properly involved other Christians as well. He said, "We are fools - - "

.....and then very triumphantly he added:

" - - for Christ's sake."

This is another in the series of sermons based upon the general theme of names given the early Christians, names chosen for them either by our Blessed Lord himself, or names that they decided to choose for themselves, or names that were thrown at them by the world. The name fool is a name that was given by the world. Get ready for it now - - it was one of the more common of all the names hurled at early Christians.

This somber truth is something that the Christian church in our day has been slow to recognize or to appreciate. This is one reason why we have so many frustrations within the Christian church, because we're always trying to compromise with the world, so that what we do may seem so very, very reasonable, or at least attractive, to them. But when the Church is truest to its nature, and the most faithful to its mission, it goes about itself in a way that the world has never been able fully to understand, and most frequently have called the Church foolish.

The word "fool" is a word that rightly belongs to many of those who are

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the grand and the good and the great. We will serve our purpose exceedingly well if for a while now you allow me to turn the pages of the Bible, figuratively speaking, and recite in your presence those grand and glorious men of God -- whom we treat now with veneration, with awe and respect, who in their day were called foolish.

Let us begin with Father Abraham. To this very day in any Jewish home...

.....and those of us who benefit by the traditions and the benefits of the Jewish religion ought likewise to treat his name with awe and with respect.....Abraham, if you please, was the first fool. At 75 years of age, the recorder of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it this way: "As a man who is already dead -- " so it seemed to the world.....at 75 years of age he turned his back upon Ur of Chaldea and went out, even as the recorder continued to put it in this manner: " -- not knowing whither he went -- "left the established home, dear to his heart and to his family, left his safety, his security and his shelter...then went out as a wanderer -- the first of the fools, who honestly believed that that voice that called to him was worthy of respect, and he could not live with himself unless he followed it where he was being led. Seemingly nobody else could understand it.

...Focus your attention upon him even more: see him taking his young son, Isaac -- this voice that had spoken to him, "Offer a sacrifice"then it seemed to him as though it was his son that had to be the sacrifice.....and as he takes Isaac and is about to put him where the fire is soon to be kindled.....how foolish can a man

become! - - - and in God's name, at that!

....but to the end of time, wherever there are those who can appreciate the grand and the good of those who are great, Abraham's name will be whispered in hushed tones, and always with the reverence that becomes it, the first of the fools.

Take his son, Isaac - - you want to continue to use the assessment of the world? - - the fool son of a fool father! He had received his inheritance on the land which was his from his father. He dug a well, and then wanderers came and said, "You can't have it. We'll take it - "and for year after year he went digging wells, and they shoved him around and pushed him....he was the kind of a man who said, "All right, you want a well - take it! - keep it!"he went out looking for another well, mark you, in a time when a well was a precious commodity, even as anyone who travels in the Near East to this day knows how precious water is....

....one day we in the West, sooner than you may

like, may discover how precious and priceless water may be....
.....here was this foolish man, who kept being shoved around, and who at sword's point could have defended, but he did not. They called him a fool, in his day. But to the end of time, let it be said again, the name of Isaac will be treated with reverence and with respect. He was one of God's people.

Continue to turn the pages, that is, the grand, the great and the good - -
- - how about Moses! How lucky can a man become! - - at a tender

age he had it made for him - - a slave's son being taken into the palace of Pharaoh, and being cared for by Pharaoh's daughter, with nothing ahead of him except position and preferment....and then one day he goes out and he sees the disadvantaged, who happen to have been his own blood, and he becomes involved. He just couldn't sleep at night when there were others who were being denied, persecuted, deprived....

...how foolish can a man be!

...to turn his back upon the prestige and preferment of Pharaoh's palace, just because he felt constrained to become involved with the disadvantaged.

One continues to turn the page. One comes now to David - - truly the beloved of God. To the end of time men and women, fathers and mothers, will name their sons after David. And in his day he wrote chapter after chapter that was labeled downright foolish, being kind to the crazed king, who was out to get his life...

...how foolish can one become?

....there's that heroic incident when those faithful ones who served under his leadership, knew of his thirst, and three men go back and draw water from the Well of Bethlehem....at the risk of their lives they bring it to him, and in that wonderful gesture of his he pours the water upon the ground - - he will not drink while other men remain thirsty....he pours the water upon the ground as though in a token of reverence and respect it was their

own life blood that had brought him that water...

foolish! - - when the leader is so thirsty!

Take the Apostle Paul, now - - turn now to the pages of the New Testament...

...he who said "We are foolish - - " ...he knew whereof he spoke.

...perhaps of all the young rabbis, no one's career was quite as promising as Saul's, if that's what he would have seen fit to pursue.

But he turns his back upon it, he goes from one community to another -
- - he's always the marked man. Read the catalog of his sufferings,
being left for half-dead.....

....just to tell people about a vision that he had!

....just to tell people about Jesus Christ who died on the cross!

....just to tell people that they'll never have any peace,

until they come to terms with God's Son in Christ!

For the moment go outside of the pages of the Bible - - the sublime fool,

Francis of Assisi, the merchant's son, clothed in purple, who prefers rags.....the pious one walking down the street, embracing a
leper

....now foolish can one become!

So one goes back and turns the page again and again, and takes another look at their lives.....Moses called by God to lead a people, and for 40 years all he gets is their complaints - - people who shout at him, "Why did you do this to us? - - why couldn't we have stayed back in Egypt? - why couldn't we have died in the land in which some of us were born?" And even Moses, for a dream, leading his people in the face of all that criticism, yet

he himself being denied the opportunity to set foot on the promised land.

Now get ready. Page after page in the Old Testament is but preparatory to the greatest and the grandest of all the fools: the carpenter's son, who at 30 years of age left a quiet pastoral town, and went out and faced the world. The only thing He had to offer was love, and He went on offering it to them. He had the power to impinge his own ideas upon people, but He never did. He simply spoke the Truth, in season and out of season. When He discovered that 'He came to His own and His own would receive Him not' - - He did not succumb to the temptation to go beyond the borders of His own land, to go out to the Gentiles, who were half-disposed to hear Him....where the climate seemed more favorable....

....how foolish can a man become?

Of all the names given to the early Christians, undoubtedly fools is the one least appealing to us. "I'm no man's fool" - - and how proud you are when you say it! The one thing that we don't want anybody to say of us is that we're stupid, and that we lack wisdom. We'll do almost anything to keep from being branded a fool - - so vain is man! Yet that's what the devout followers of Jesus appeared like to the world, for the simple reason that the outsider could never quite understand why Love should be so sacrificial..

...to love the lovely? - who can't understand that!...but to

love the unlovely?

...the outsider could never quite understand how Truth could be so demanding...
.....how Goodness could be so exacting - - how meeting the need of another person could be so imperative. To this day any number of people have never

been able to quite figure out just why that Carpenter's Son left Nazareth and allowed Himself to end up in a place called Calvary.

If it weren't that I would run the risk of divulging a measure of confidences, I'd like to do more than what I am about to do now, and simply indicate the devotion of people who belong to this congregation -- who in the eyes of other people appear very foolish. It could be the husband, it could be the wife speaking, either one, as the case may be -- "Give up your Saturday night, to study a Sunday School lesson?" -- "Give up your Sunday afternoon to visit the Sunday School boy or girl who happened to be absent for three weeks, then you heard he was ill....give up your Sunday afternoon to do this, for a family that you've never met! -- for a family that sends their youngster to Sunday School!"how foolish can you be? Yet the very strength and the vitality of this congregation, by the grace of God, is characterized by this type of devotion.

There are members of this congregation who go out of their way to guarantee a measure of stability and harmony within the parish. Why take time to do it? Why take time to explain? In the judgment of friends, neighbors, perhaps, it does appear foolish. Why, on a Sunday morning, the world could well afford to ask, is there a particular point in the worship service when there is laid upon the altar sums of money that go to people in far-away lands, people that we will never see, and where poverty remains the rule of life, the standard of their society.....to the world this is a very foolish thing. Yet the strength and the vitality of this parish is characterized by those who are willing to do this kind of foolish thing for Jesus Christ.

I can't say it any other way because this is the most apt descriptive....

...there's a little old lady, out in Utah, who claims membership in this congregation. She never allows a Sunday morning to pass without being, in spirit, in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, and when the prayer period is offered to God in behalf of everything that's going to take place -- how foolish can she become? -- when she may never return to this place, and she doesn't know 95% of you who are here! Speaking of that little old lady, living in loneliness, having fractured her hip, living on a very limited, limited budget....lo and behold! -- when the Property Improvement Program went out some months ago, that series of mimeographed pages, she read it with the utmost of respect and appreciation for God's House, and wrote a letter within the week, and said, "In addition to anything else that I might give to my Lord, please accept each month a very modest token of two dollars regularly."

.....how foolish can you get! -- she may never get back here!
-- she may never see it! But she wants God's House to be kept in good repair and as a place of beauty that brings glory to God who made the world beautiful. How foolish.

To the outsider, you see, this is the only word that can be given. Maybe they'll go on calling us unreasonable, until one day they may be able to discover the difference in your life and my life, because we follow in the footsteps of Him who in their judgment was foolish enough to sacrifice.

No sermon is ever complete once the preacher walks away from the pulpit. The sermon is made complete when, in your life, you apply the truth, and you identify. I would remind you of a man named Moses, who had it made, but then went out and identified with the disadvantaged. Because of this, the world remains with a measure of hope which otherwise we'd have been denied.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen, October 9, 1966.

It is right and proper that from time to time announcement be made of intercession that should be offered to God ere as a people we leave this haly place. There are two things that come to our attention as a people of God now. Within the past week two diametrically opposed things have happened in the lives of two different people. One, a member of this congregation, has been told that there is nothing that can be done for what lies ahead in her life, medically speaking. This requires terrific adjustment. Another member of this congregation, within the same week, has been told that what she feared had been canceled. Now joy is in her soul. Whether it be pain, or whether it be joy, together we wait in the Presence of the Lord. Let us pray.

O GOD, Who dost know our times and our seasons and our need: Make us aware of Thy nearness. Whatever may be the condition, whatever may be the circumstance, may we never, never forget that we cannot drift beyond Your love and Your care, and that each of us continues to hold to Thee a measure of responsibility, that in plenty, or in poverty, that in sickness or in health, we may witness for Thee.

So we lift up in the arms of our prayers these servants particularly, members of our Family in God, and others with them, who likewise approach Thy throne of Grace, from different angles, and perhaps with a different

IT IS right and proper, O God, that we who pray for peace in the soul and fulfillment of purpose in our lives, should also pray for peace among nations and for Your fulfillment of purpose among the peoples of the world. O God, day by day we offer to Thee a prayer for peace, that Thou would still the consciences of those engaged in the business and the traffic of war, that Thou will prosper the effort of those who work toward peace among men.

We do not fail to lift up in the arms of our prayers those in responsible positions who give their days and their nights to bring about peace and concord.

O God, ere we leave this place we pray for this congregation, that it may witness effectively for Thee in whatever way Thou seest fit to put before us. And as we begin now writing another chapter this fall and this winter, may all that we do bring honor and glory to Thy Holy Name.

Forgive each of us his sin, cleanse us by Thy grace, keep us faithful unto life everlasting. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, in Whose Name together we pray, Our Father.....

"FRIENDS"

There's one thing certain, by the time this series of sermons being preached in Saint Luke Church from now until the end of June will have run its course, that you will agree upon the fact that there is rich variety in the names given to the disciples. One is absolutely amazed by the different labels which they had attached to them either by themselves, either by Jesus Christ, or by the world itself.

Of all the names that the disciples carried, none, I suggest to you now, is more warm-souled than the name that we are going to study today. It's the name called friends.

Can't you picture it perhaps happening like this: our Blessed Lord had spent three years now in the company of this disciple band. They had done so many things together, they had walked familiar paths, they had observed the performance of the miracles, they had heard Him preach sermons. Now in the course of these three years He had discovered certain things about them. You just can't take twelve people and put them down in a little circle, and say, "This is the circle in which you move" for a period of three years, without eventually having those twelve people get on one another's nerves. That's human nature, especially so as you think of that disciple group -- how different they were from one another. Talk about variety....

....one of them was impulsive - he was always speaking

....one was reckless and daring

....one was ready to call down fire from heaven as soon as anyone

said anything that wasn't particularly to his liking

.....one was shy, reticent

.....in the disciple group surely there was one who almost

seldom, if ever, did any kind of talking

This was the disciple band.

Each had his own standard, each had his own assessment of one another. And as can be readily understood, our Blessed Lord must have been impressed by the way they got on one another's nerves every now and then.

Small matter then, that one day Jesus Christ looked them straight in the eye as He gathered them together.....and why don't you think that it happened this way - - He must have said to them, "I suppose you wonder what I think of you. Well, I want you to know what I think of you. I call you my friends." That was the basis of His relationship with them.

Now, don't get me wrong, nothing in this sermon is intended to imply that friendship had no meaning whatsoever until the day of Jesus Christ. From the very beginning there were always people who were friendly, one toward another. It's the nature of man to reach out toward somebody else. Man is by nature a corporate being. It is not good for man to be alone. And every civilization and every culture has its beautiful testimonies to the lasting quality of a grand and a glorious friendship.

Even in the Old Testament, centuries before the day of Jesus Christ, you read the story of David and Jonathon. And did we not, as youngsters in Sunday School, say to ourselves, "What a wonderful thing life must be, if in life you could meet someone who would be to somebody else as David and Jonathon were to one another." We read the story in the Old Testament of Ruth and Naomi, and likewise we say to ourselves, "Life is worth living, if in a relationship be-

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tween two people there can be something as beautiful and as wonderful as this." This is not to say that people did not know what it was to have friends until the day of Jesus Christ, but in the day of Jesus Christ, when He looked upon the disciples and said, "I call you my friends" something happened to that word friend which gave it a degree of consecration, a warmth and a glow that it wears until the end of time.

Perhaps you can understand when I say this to you.....there was the woman who one day met the man who claimed her heart, and she said to him as he mentioned her name -- called her by name for the very first time, and she said to him, "I never knew my name could be as lovely as all that until I heard you speak it." For you see, when he spoke her name, it was filled with tenderness, compassion, understanding, a measure of fidelity that would last as long as the two of them would live. Even so when Jesus Christ spoke the word friend, it was filled with a measure of compassion, tenderness, faith and trust that would last as long as the years would come and go.

So Jesus Christ consecrates friendship, and you and I have lived long enough to know that we cannot live without friends. Friendship is life's truest treasure. You and I are dependent upon the cross-fertilization of the mind and spirit of a kindred soul. We come into our life maturity only as we are befriended. Properly speaking, it can be said that no man is hopeless as long as he has a friend....no man is useless as long as he can be a friend.

Let it not be a surprise to you, our Blessed Lord, with all the sufficiency of God, when He was here on earth, called to His side a group of people, and the Scripture says He called them, that they might be with Him. There are times when He went places all by Himself, but there were also times when He had no

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desire to go without looking around to those who seemed to be a little bit nearer to Him....until He caught the eye of Peter, and He caught the eye of James and He caught the eye of John - - and even within that little group of three there was one who seemed to be nearer to Him than all the rest and to the end of time carries the title "The beloved disciple" - - who leaned on the shoulder of Jesus on the very night in which He was betrayed. Our Blessed Lord, it is said of Him - - He called them that they should be with Him. Friendship is necessary. It's the all-important ingredient of life. Cherish your friends, support them, undergird them.

Now these disciples took the name of friend for three different reasons, I suggest. One was, they looked upon Jesus Christ as their friend.

Do you realize what a wonderful thing this is, to be able to have the assurance that God is kindly-disposed toward us? No other religion on the face of the earth presents God as we Christians know Him, so graciously disposed toward us. I don't know how it is with you, but every now and then I say to myself, if I were to assess the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, what would I say of Him? There's one description in Scripture itself upon which none can possibly improve, for one of the Gospel writers, when he was thinking of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ - - the meaning of it all - - the Man, the Method and the Message.....came up with this figure of speech: "He was a friend of sinners." That's what He was. So they called themselves friends because they knew that they had a friend in Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you now about a legend. Let it be repeated now, it is only a legend.....you may find it difficult to substantiate it by Biblical truth, yet it commands respect.

.....the legend has it that St. Peter would make his rounds in heaven, and he would know a measure of delight in recognizing this person and recognizing that person, and recalling how he met them for the first time at the gate, when they entered heaven.

.....but every now and then he'd come across someone that for the life of him he couldn't quite figure out why they were there, because he had never seen them before. He scratched that head of his and wondered - - how did they get in? He had no recollection whatsoever of their coming in at the main gate (it's only a legend, now, - - remember)

....then one day he made a discovery - - out there was the back wall (a figure of speech, of course)...and leaning over that wall was the figure of a man, with an extended arm, a helping hand, giving a gracious assist to people who were coming in, one at a time, into heaven over the back fence.

...the legend has it that St. Peter grabbed the man, as much as to say "What gives here? - - what's going on?"....and had the surprise of his life - - the man turned, and St. Peter discovered the face of Jesus Christ.

Peter begs for an explanation - "What's the meaning of this, Lord?"and the legend has it that the Lord replies, "When I was looking down upon earth I saw these people coming toward the direction of heaven, crawling, on their knees, and skirting the main entrance. And I said to myself, why should this happen? - - and then when I called to them, and they said to me that they would not consider

themselves worthy to come to the main gate -- they would not so much as consider themselves worthy to stand in the very presence of St. Peter....

.....so they came crawling, around to the back gate"

....and as He continues to give them a gracious assist,

Jesus says, "These are my friends! I knew them on earth."

Well, you may not substantiate it by Biblical truth, yet there's something that you can't ignore; that no one -- absolutely no one gets into heaven without the gracious assist of Jesus Christ, and that gracious assist He gives because He happens to be, in all the fulness of God, the friend of sinners.

So that's why they called themselves friend, because they had a friend in God, they had a friend in Jesus Christ.

And that, basically, is what the Christian church is intended to be. If I were to challenge you with this kind of a thing, and say simply this statement: Saint Luke Church is _____. Whatever else you might say, you ought to be able to say this:

Saint Luke Church is a fellowship comprised of people who are the friends of Jesus Christ.

I recall every now and then the first time I stood here, walked down this aisle -- -- you have no idea what a lonely feeling it is, to be exposed for the first time to a people with whom, under God, you will live and work and walk together. The redeeming factor came quickly while I said to myself, I don't know you people.....and while you said to yourself, we don't know you -- and yet on second thought there is something that we do know. Of you I knew this: that every single one of you who comprised membership in this

church was committed servant of Jesus Christ. This, by the grace of God, I would like that you could think of me.....and that was enough to take away a feeling of loneliness, because we had a common Friend.

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Those early weeks it was expressed in this way...shaking hands at the door, somebody going out and saying, "We have a mutual friend - - my cousin's boy went to Susquehanna with you.".....or perhaps somebody calling on the phone would say, "We haven't met yet, but I feel as though we know each other because my father came from Williamsport and I think you knew him." So, you see, the bond was being established because together, somewhere in our relationship, there was something we had in common. The early Christians called themselves friends because in common they cherished the friendship of Jesus Christ.

They called themselves friends because they looked upon one another as friends - - "if Jesus is my friend, and He's your friend, then we are meant to be friends." And this is what the Christian church must always remind herself, congregations must remind themselves of this. As we live and we work together, if perchance over a period of time which is the irritating, the annoying disturbing factor, then everything must be changed and seen in the light of our common relationship to Jesus Christ. Nothing should ever be allowed to disturb this factor of friendship. This is the only place on this earth, it seems to me, where pure, unadulterated friendship can still be known.

In the third place, they took this label friend, not only because they looked upon one another as their friend, but then they said, we must be friends to the world! This is what Jesus Christ does with friendship - - He consecrates it, gives it a new depth, and a width. The Christian friendship is never an

exclusive thing -- it's an inclusive thing -- as wide as the world itself, as deep as the need of humanity.

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Augustine was not always the pious man that we now know him to be. Before he was converted he was licentious, he was reckless, he was hapless. But he was converted. Historians tell us there are two reasons that prompted his conversion. One was the fact that he had a pious mother named Monica, who continued to pray for the conversion of her son. The other factor, that there was a man that he once met, a distinguished preacher, theologian. And Augustine admits it wasn't the man's theology that converted him, or helped to convert him, important as correct theology is -- it wasn't the man's preaching, as important as effective preaching of the Word is, but he said that "simply because the man showed himself friendly toward me, took note of me."

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You know the precious meaning of friendship, don't you. Who is the one who said that "to be a friend is to affirm the meaning of another person." That's exactly what God in Christ has done for us! He has affirmed our meaning.

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When people meet in New Member classes here in Saint Luke Church, we invite members of the staff to make a presentation, to tell about themselves, to tell about their work. Sister Dorothy is always included in the schedule. And like as not, when she makes her presentation there are people who have never seen a real, live parish deaconess before. Some are somewhat intrigued with the name "Sister" -- it's not at all unusual for someone to put the question to her, "Why do they call you 'Sister'?" She gives a very proper and a very correct answer -- the answer of the Lutheran Church, and the answer of the Disconate itself, "They call us 'Sister' because this is what we want most to be to people, as a sister in Christ." Who is a Christian? A Christian is one who wants to be to somebody else as a friend in Christ.

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"CHRISTIANS"

The sermon of necessity is a brief one. Let me deal with it as forthrightly as I possibly can. It's another in the series based upon the general theme, "Names Given to the Early Christians."

Of all the names given to the early Christians, none is more significant than the title of today's sermon. It is the name "Christian." And the text is the 26th verse of the 11th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And the disciples were called Christian
first at Antioch."

The statement in itself is a statement of fact, but it is no mere fact. One wonders if there is any such thing at any time as a mere fact. For a fact never stands by itself and by itself alone. There is always the number of things that surround it, the underlying principles and factors. That's why I can say very quickly to you that this text is a preacher's dream -- it's meant for a sermon. It gives itself very easily to three divisions, and each division is an answer to a question. And the three questions are WHO? -- WHAT? -- WHERE?

Who got the name Christian? It's a given name, but given only to a particular group of people. And who were they? The text says they were the disciples. And who are disciples? -- faithful followers. A disciple is one who walks in the footsteps of a master. These people who got the name Christian are men and women who with fidelity and earnestness kept following in the way of Jesus Christ.

The name Christian does not come to those who are on-again-off-again followers of Jesus Christ. The name Christian will not be given to those who betray, deny, forsake, consistently. A follower may stumble, he may falter, but a disciple is one who, when he falls and when he stumbles, always gets up and keeps looking

in the direction of the master. They who were so faithful, one day were given the grandest of all names. They were the ones who were called Christians. Let us remember that -- the disciples, the faithful ones,.....it just isn't given to anybody.

And what were they called? I can't make too much of this, I am sorry, time is of the essence. They were called Christians.

Immediately you say to yourself, why not a name that's associated with the name Jesus? Why weren't they called Members of the Friends of Jesus? Why weren't they called, as an example, Jesuits -- a perfectly good name, highly respected and revered throughout the Church today, in a certain quarter. Why were they called Christians?

To the everlasting credit of those who gave the name, and likewise to the credit of those who received it, when people thought of the disciples they did not simply associate them with an historic figure who happened to be a human being, Jesus by name. But when they thought of the disciples they associated them directly with God. And that's exactly our understanding of Christ. Jesus is God-come-to-us-in-Christ....He is God-become-manifest....the Anointed....the Messiah....the Promised One. He is the Christ of God.

That's why if you were to be here at eleven o'clock, you would note what we do, as we've always done it before. A group of new members is being received. Their loyalty is not to a particular congregation, but their loyalty is being expressed to Jesus Christ, and that expression of their loyalty is going to be made now through this Family in God. Don't ever let it become a cheap thing, I beg you. Some of us have gotten to the place where it's a lot easier to say "Family in God" than "Saint Luke Congregation" -- and that's precisely the way

it ought to be. And there could be something wrong with us if we don't first see it that way.

I can't make too much of this, the disciples were called Christians. There was something about them that made them aware of the presence of Christ. One of the grandest and most glorious things that could ever be said of a single human being -- in fact, I think of nothing better, is the thing that was said when Henry Drummond was introduced to a group of students at Northfield.....the man who introduced him said, "I want to present you someone who will remind you of Jesus Christ." This is the kind of thing that ought to be said about anyone who is a follower, and there's something wrong with our discipleship if it can't be said, because it's the one thing that makes us distinctive, this God-alignment, this Christ-commitment.

Ah, the third point of the preacher's sermon: who? what? -- where?
The text says Antioch.

Antioch? A city -- the third largest city in the Roman empire. The text does not say, "When the disciples were leaving the synagogue, people said, look at them, they're Christians." Important as coming to church is, the world may not simply label you Christians because you have come to church. The people in Antioch did not discover this band of people separated, off by themselves in a little prayer group -- fervently as I believe in intercessory prayer. It was only as they found them out in the streets, in the shops, in the market-place with their sleeves rolled up, if you please, trafficking with all the dirt, dealing directly with all the sin of a wicked world.....that's where they put their finger to their lips and said, "Look at them." That's where they represented Christ.

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Some of you came from an apartment complex this morning. You may say as others have said to me, "Pastor, there seem to be so few of us; it's only when I come home from church around noon that I begin to see any kind of activity in the parking lot or in the corridors of the apartment house." It could be that even your coming here today was a witness of your Christian faith...it could be that that is what these people will discover in you when you deal with them in the corridors, on the elevators - - the attitude that they discover in you when they find you on the parking lot.

We never quite know what's going to happen when the telephone rings at the Parsonage. Last night, just about eleven o'clock, the phone rings....it's a hostess of an airline, known to the Parsonage family, calling from National Airport - - "Can I come out and spend the night with you? - - not just because I want to spend the night, but I'd like to go to church in the morning." She's charming, and attractive, as they know how to choose them.....and I couldn't help but think how effective her witness is when the other girls will know that she got up this morning and came to church. This may qualify her for the name Christianbut not nearly as much as when she goes about her routine, with all the pressures of a wicked world, with all the pressures of a world bent on pleasure, with all the pressures of a world bent on its selfish interest, when against this person, and against that person by her attitude, by the basic integrity of all that she is in Christ - - that's where she deserves the namethat's where it will be given.

.....who? what? where?

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"BELIEVERS"

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We consider today another in the series of names given the early followers of Jesus Christ. It's the title "believer." I'll grant you, it's risky business to put to yourself a question such as this: what would I think would be God's favorite name for any one of the followers of Jesus Christ?

We know certain of the names which Jesus himself chose for them....

....He called them to be His disciples

.....He said, "Ye shall be my witnesses"

.....He said, "Henceforth I call you friends"

...any one of these could have been the favorite that God himself would have.

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But I make bold to suggest to you that, putting any one of these aside, a name that I would cherish for us would be the name we consider today - - - believer. For this, you see, is the end result of all God's dealings with us, to get us to the point where we believe.

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Isn't it John who in the Fourth Gospel says, "These things are written that ye may believe, and that in believing ye may have life eternal." In the counselling sessions that we have, every now and then we find one or other saying to the estranged party, "But why won't you believe me? Why won't you trust me?" It's always an extremely difficult thing when a relationship between people is broken, and you know the lasting good which even God sees fit to give in a healthy, wholesome relationship is suffering - - it just isn't there....because, for a while at least, the devil could be at work, in one or both of the parties involved. And the question of questions remains - - "believe me! - - trust me!"

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One can readily speak like this, because even when Jesus Christ was here on earth, sermon after sermon that He preached, miracle after miracle that He performed, life after life that He touched, and the person was made whole.....there was the evidence, round about them in every way, and yet it's a matter of historical, scriptural record that Jesus Christ himself is found pleading with a group of people, "And if I tell you the truth, why don't you believe me?" Would I surprise you if I were to tell you that I find it extremely difficult to think that there could be a doubter's gate into Heaven? I can give you this on good authority: "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" - - but whoever comes to Him must believe that He is able to save.

These many deeds, these wonderful works, He could not work there - - and then the Gospel writer names the town.....because of their unbelief. It has been said of us, which at once becomes a challenge, "There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved." This is how precious this matter of belief is. Essentially, it's a matter of life or death - - it's as important as all that.

I might have very well begun this sermon by saying, "I want to talk to you about a half-truth, which is essentially a lie!" It's a half-truth that's bandied around, it may have fallen from your lips, could be part of your own thinking: "It doesn't make much difference what a man believes - - it's the way he

lives that counts"

.....it makes all the difference in the world what a man believes, because what a man believes determines how he lives! Belief is the basis for behavior; and creed is the cause for conduct. That's why when our Lord was here on earth He

C was doing everything He possibly could to make it easier for people to believe. He even went to Calvary -- that last magnificent thrust of His life, that even in death they should be convinced of the power of the love of God. He even went deliberately to Calvary's hill, believing that "If I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me".....as much as to say, "If nothing else works, I believe that this will."

O Now the time came when the followers of Jesus Christ were designated as believers. They observed their conduct. It was because they lived differently, that somebody raised the question, what must they believe? And when you probe, you come up with these answers.....

P Y First off, these followers of Jesus Christ believed that there is a God. That's right -- that's the point at which they began! They knew the world just didn't happen. They might not be able to articulate it as well as you can, but down deep in the heart of every man there's something of the theologian, and life itself has a way of making theologians of us all. And they said to themselves, there was a Master-Mind, a creative force, a power that works for righteousness. They even thought in these terms: there is a Ground-of-Being, there is an Ultimate Being -- of course they did! They might not have had the words, but they thought in those terms. And this is one of the priceless gifts of the Near Eastern mentality, the cradle of our civilization -- it always began with the fact of God.

They never doubted the existence of God. But the distinguishing characteristics of Christians is not that they believe that there is a God, but they believe certain things about this God:

....they believe that He is creative

....they believe that He is redemptive

...they believe that He sanctifies

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Some day we'll have to have a session, or you'll have to learn in one way or another the meaning of these symbols that surround us. When the couples club meets on Saturday night, Pastor Naegle is going to take them on a tour of the church, just as he took the Order of Saint John some Saturdays ago and pointed out the meaning of the symbolism. We're surrounded by it, and the symbolism is there because it's to speak to us. And maybe we'll discover in our study together that one of the chiefest symbols is the one directly above the chancel step in the triangular section. It basically portrays what Christians believe about God. It's the symbol of the Trinity.

Christians believe that God is creative

...Christians believe that God is redemptive

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....Christians believe that God is Sanctifier, preserver in the faith.

It's the first thing you hear the officiating minister say when you come to church....it's the last thing you hear him say when you turn your back upon the altar and walk away -- "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And when the artist was finishing that symbol -- it happened to have been on a Tuesday and we brought part of the Confirmation Class in, and we stood down here. And that was the day we were talking about God's name. And the suggestion was made that up there, in the highest part of this building, here in this interior, the symbol for God's name was to be shown. This is God's House, we are God's people.....His name is over and above us all!

And then we talked about the meaning of that symbol, the creative act of God, the redemptive act of God, the fact of His sanctifying, enabling us to grow in faith. One of the youngsters, with a perception beyond his years, said some-

thing like this: "Then God must be as God does." Christians believe this about God - - He is as He does!

He creates.....He redeems.....He sanctifies, He preserves,

He strengthens us in the Faith.....

Well, these followers of Jesus Christ believed this about Him.

Now three things, to make it crystal clear, please:

They believed in the person of Jesus Christ. They believed that God came to earth in all His fulness in the form of a human being. If you believe this, cherish the thought! - for any number of people, this is the obstacle to their faith. This is one reason why they killed Jesus Christ, for there were those who said, "It's blasphemy to believe that God could humble Himself and come in the form of a human being." It was because they knew so much about themselves, with all the limitations of the flesh, that they wouldn't believe that God would dirty Himself. The trouble was, they didn't know enough about the nature and the character of God to believe that God could be big enough to become little.....that God in His goodness could be gracious. This is part of the contribution that Christian belief has given to the world, that God is like this, and all because they believe in the person of Jesus Christ - - in Him all the fulness of God does dwell.

But these Christians also believed that it wasn't something that happened once upon a time. These Christians were people who did not simply believe that He was born of the Virgin Mary, He grew up in Nazareth, He was crucified, He suffered under Pontius Pilate.....and then as though you turn the page and say, "That's the way it was." But in those marvelous post-Resurrection ap-

pearances it was established clearly for them that this Jesus who came, that this Jesus who lived, - - lives. They believed in the person of Jesus Christ. They believed in His person - - now - - always.

It's one thing to believe that He lived....it's far more wonderful to believe that He lives. You know that's why you're in church today, don't you? That's why, in company with the greater part of all Christendom, it's the first day of the week that we observe and keep holy, because those early Christians said: "This is the wonderful thing about the fact of Jesus Christ - - He arose from the dead - it was on the first day of the week. And as long as there's ever going to be a man on the face of this earth, let this profound truth be echoed and re-echoed, even as we from this day onward observe the first day of the week." - - - "Up from the grave He arose, and He lives.....He lives!"

This is extremely difficult for some people, let me be as honest with you as I possibly can. There are any number of people who are willing to read the Bible and believe that once upon a time, in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, in Jerusalem, Jesus Christ lived....walked.....there. Believe that He is present now?

At eight o'clock this morning, being the first Sunday in the month, we offered the Sacrament of the Altar. What is the priceless teaching of the Sacrament as we Lutherans cherish it? - - that He is truly present!

The third thing that they believed about their Saviour is that only as Jesus Christ comes into their lives, to save them from their sins, is their only purpose in living. They honestly believed it. They couldn't possibly think what life would be like without Him. That's why they cherished His words, and that's why He spoke them - - preparing them for the moment when they would need it

most, He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Whenever I've gone to the Coliseum in Rome I feel as though I am in church; because I hush my mind, I quiet my heart, and I try to think of what it was once like in the Coliseum....when they dragged Christians from their cells, and for the entertainment of the Emperor and his guests they released them in front of the infuriated lions.....and then the Emperor laughed, as the lions tore them to shreds, even as a cat pouncing upon a mouse will shake it. When these Christians came and faced such a thing, there was a halo over their heads, there was the light of Heaven in their eyes, because they believed in Jesus Christ, in His actual presence, even though they were surrounded by all those who would torment them with hell. They believed that even in their sacrificial life there was purpose in their death!

I carry around in my wallet a sentence or two that David wrote me (I think he gave it to me on his birthday - - I should be happy to believe that he did)it's something he had gleaned from his readings. The statement goes like this: There are two great moments in the life of any person: one, at the time of his birth, when he is born; and the second one - - the moment when he discovers why he was born. These followers of Jesus Christ....as they knew themselves being forgiven, knew they were being forgiven for a purpose - - they were saved in order to serve. They looked upon Jesus Christ as the Giver-of-Life, the Sustainer-of-Life, the Preserver-of-Life.

Is this what you believe about Jesus Christ? With all the ardor of my soul I tell you, it makes all the difference in your life if this is what you believe. If you believe it without difficulty, thank God! If you're having trouble, be patient with yourself. If you know of others who can't believe as

easily as you do, do everything you can by the basic integrity of your devotion to Christ to let even your life become Exhibit A.

I am always impressed by the fact that ever so often Jesus Christ never argued about the fact of God. And the longer I live, I am more convinced that you never find God at the end of an argument. You can never argue people into believing, not any more than you can argue someone into loving you. All that you are is basically demonstrated when they simply respond. If you should know of anyone who finds it difficult to believe in the presence of Jesus Christ, let me give you this bit of advice. It's come to me from somebody else and I'm happy to pass it on.

He was an old gentleman, facing the slope, and he was afraid that he was going to die without a full awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ. He made this known to his dominie - - to his Scots pastor. The devout and perceptive preacher simply said to the man who was confined to his bed.... "You find it difficult to pray, you find it difficult to talk with God? You don't seem to find it difficult to talk with me. I'll tell you what you do - - why don't you picture God as though He were sitting in this rocker alongside of you. Talk to Him, as you would talk to a person. Begin this way."

The next time the dominie heard anything about the gentleman it was his daughter who said, "He died in his sleep. There was a look of peace upon his face, and the strangest thing, Dominie - - he had his hand on the arm of the rocker." Don't let your sophistication stand in the way of even beginning at this point!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
November 6, 1966

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WERE NOT our waking thoughts, O God, thoughts of prayer? Did not we adore Thee when we recognized the gift of another day? Did we not give thanks to Thee ere we came to this place, that with gratitude in our hearts we could assemble with those who love the Lord, who mark the path that leads to a House of Prayer? Did we not come to this place grateful and joyful in the knowledge and in the truth that we know what we believe, and above all else, we know in Whom we believe, the One who is able to save, the One who makes His claim upon our heart, and here, through this place and through this people we respond with loyalty to Thee.

O GOD, hear our prayers for one another. Hear our prayers for those who would witness more effectively within their family circle and where they work. Hear our prayers, O God, for peace and those who would work in the interest of peace.

HEAR our prayers, O God, for those who according to their belief, that as Christ meets our needs, so we in Christ meet the needs of others. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord, who forgives us our every sin.

OUR FATHER.....

"GOD'S CHOSEN"

Undoubtedly each of you knows full well that some sermons are easier to preach than other sermons. Sometimes that fact is determined because the preacher is aware that within the congregation itself there may be people who do not come with receptive minds. It is not always easy to preach when there are people who are not willing to hear.

Sometimes there are physical factors that have their effect upon the preaching of the sermon, improper ventilation, perhaps certain characteristics of the place in which the congregation may be gathered.

But these are quite insignificant when one comes to deal with a particular verse of Scripture, which, in itself, may not be easy to explain; because as soon as one reads the verse of Scripture, within this person or that person there may be raised all kinds of barriers and pre-conceived notions as to what he thinks the preacher ought to maintain and what he thinks the preacher ought to say.

This and this alone prevails right now. Not anything that you might bring to this text, but perhaps a certain measure of limitation which the preacher himself brings to it, because -- you want an admission? -- there's a shyness on my part to deal with a text as wonderful, as grand and as glorious as this one.....a shyness on my part, lest perhaps, despite human limitation, I should not tell fully the whole story. This is always a hazard. There are moments when a preacher turns his back on the pulpit and walks away, saying, if only -- if only I could have spoken five minutes

Longer and could have explained it differently - - lest someone misunderstand.

Well, here is the text, it's from Paul's letter to the Colossians, it's the 12th verse, it's the 3rd chapter:

"Put on therefore, God's chosen ones - - "

It's that descriptive! It's this name that Paul gives to Christians - - God's chosen ones.....this is what frightens you, because there's a kind of implication, you see, that if God makes a choice, then that also means that He eliminates. As soon as you begin to choose, you imply a degree of rejection. Is God this kind of a God, who when He looks upon all the people on the face of the earth may pass certain people by, only in order to give a good, long look at some other groups of people? or some individual? This is what has troubled some people a great deal when they consider the disciples.

When I did the "circle circuit" for the Women of the Church.....and what a delightful experience to go from one group to another, talking about the fourth Gospel, and maintaining that John was the writer of the fourth Gospel....

....ah, it's that expression - - the beloved disciple, as though Jesus looked upon this man in a way that He did not look upon any of the others, and how as you read in the Scripture record for yourself, when Jesus was here on earth, having chosen the disciples - - He even chose from within the chosen group! And there are those among you who take issue with Jesus Christ because you can't picture it. Here's the group of twelve, and He turns around and He looks, and He doesn't go anywhere until He catches the eye of Peter, and James, and apparently reluctant to go off by Himself until He's caught John's eye...

"....then he took with him Peter, James and John - - "

.....this matter of choosing!

There are those who tell us that when you confront people who have never heard about Jesus Christ with the Gospel, that one of the obstacles of the Christian faith to these people is the fact that you talk about a God who calls and a God who chooses. This is part of the problem in Asia, when Christianity is presented -- they just can't think in terms of the God of the Old Testament.....because there's a thread that runs through the Old Testament -- you know very well that it does -- a thread that deals with a chosen people, the people of God! And this is an expression that's not completely alien to the New Testament -- the ecclesia -- the beginning of the church, dealt with God's calling people out of the world. God's (and I use the word in quotation now, lest you superimpose your own limited understanding of it)"God's election of people". It's a sticky text! And it's a figure of speech that doesn't go down very easily with some people.

"God's chosen ones" -- it opens up a whole Pandora's Box, you see....

...predestination....for-ordination....election....God's choices...

...man's free will....irresistible grace....prevenient grace

....but I gather courage as I come to the pulpit. The subject was deliberately chosen months ago. It will not be eliminated from the series -- "God's Chosen Ones", the precious figure of speech....let's do what we can to understand it, to appreciate it, and if be, become worthy of it.

Well now, what's to be said" Against everything that's going to be said, against everything that has been said. There are certain things that must be kept in mind, and these things must deal with the nature and the character of God himself. When you talk about a God who chooses, first ask yourself the question,

...who is this God who chooses? ...to what end will He choose?

....what is He like?

This is the primary thing.

So I would remind you at least of three things:

He is good. That's where He got His name. The God who chooses is always God; whatever God does is good.

The second thing when you think about this God who chooses: He is love. Whatever He does, He does in love! And God is never less than God, God is never less than good, God is never less than love. The very mention of the name God implies his sovereignty...He is over and above all, and His rule remains.

Now the third thing that needs to be said -- please don't forget it: His ways are not always to be understood by us. Even though what we know about God we know because we know Jesus Christ, the fact of God has its mysterious quality, and His ways and His will may be inscrutable to us. Don't be afraid of that. Are you bold enough, are you vain enough to believe that you can always fully understand the mind and the will of God? This is why we're cursed by a variety of theologies in our days, because it's the vanity of man to believe that he can reduce God to his reason. There is always the element of mystery that remains in God, because God is God and you and I are human. God is infinite, we are finite. Maybe this will help us, then.

Now God, to accomplish His purpose, chooses, in order that His purpose may be accomplished and fulfilled. Are you afraid of that concept? A father and a mother may have five children. In the course of their family relationship, in the course of their family development, there may be a errand that needs to be run, a mission that must be accomplished, and where is the parent who will not hesitate to make the decision as to which one among the five will be chosen for the mission? You ought not to be frightened by this -- not that a parent

loves one of his children more than the other, not that he's showing favoritism, but it's a mission that needs to be accomplished, and a choice has to be made!

We who love democracy, we're always making choices in democracy, and we're always choosing leaders to represent us. A mission needs to be accomplished, and so a choice has to be made, and we make our choice among those whom we believe to be best qualified to accomplish the mission. This is a matter of decision-making, this is a matter of choosing. This ought not to frighten us.

Maybe this helps us to understand why God, in order to accomplish certain things, calls out certain individuals. With all my heart and soul, with all the ardor of my life I believe that this is the meaning of the church - - that of all the people on the face of the earth, God calls to people. That word ecclesia means "called out".....in order that His precious Gospel might be proclaimed, that God's mission should be fulfilled and accomplished.

To say that there is sovereign rule of God, to say that God chooses, to say that God elects, does not mean that you and I have no choice in the matter. I tell you it's down-right frightening - - think of it over and over again.... man is unique in his freedom to be able to say "no" to God. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth He preached a sermon to five thousand people. The call that He made He made to five thousand people....but all did not hear, all did not respond. Man can choose even not to hear.

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth and He walked down the streets of certain Galilean and Judean villages, He saw certain people, and to some He said specifically "Follow me" - - but yet in a certain sense the whole life of Jesus Christ is one continuous encounter and confrontation with the souls of men! To be encountered by Jesus Christ is to hear Him say "Follow me". This

is the meaning of the Incarnation, that man should be confronted by God himself in as direct a way as possible.

And yet of all the people who lived at that time how many responded? -- not that God did not call! Even Bernard Shaw when he writes about Joan of Arc, tells how the Dauphin ridicules her, publicly makes sport of her, and he says....

....."These voices, these voices that you hear in the
meadow -- you're always talking about these voices
-- why don't I hear these voices of God?"

....and in true faith, the Maid of Orleans simply replies, "But God is speaking --
God's speaking to you, but you don't hear!"

It's down-right frightening, I say, think of it over and over again: man is unique in his freedom to be able to say "no" to God.

But on the other hand, the very blessedness of it all remains -- man is able to say "yes" to God. It's good basic Pauline theology....Paul tells us, he gives a picture of a man who having been encountered by Jesus Christ, says, "I am the man who said "yes" to Him -- I was not disobedient to the Heavenly vision." It remained a mystery to Paul to the very day that he died, why God happened to choose him in the way that He chose him, but, while Paul talks about election, while Paul talks about having been chosen, Paul also talks about obedience.....which is response. Declare it once.....declare it a thousand times: God calls; man answers.

I'm sorry that so much of our sophistication keeps us from appreciating what some of the old Gospel hymn writers were trying to say. Part of my spiritual nurture included the singing of that hymn:

"Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you, and for me."

God wills all men to be saved.

Say it once, declare it a thousand times; God calls, man answers.....and it's either with a "yes", or with a "no". This is rank presumption on my part, I admit, to ascribe any kind of vocabulary to the mind of God himself. But if one wants to risk this kind of thing, I'm not so sure in the vocabulary of God there's such a thing as the word "maybe". God does not deal in indecisiveness with us. God calls.....man answers - - "yes" or "no". God's not about to settle for a "maybe".

Now ask, who are the chosen? The chosen - - they are the ones who respond. They are the chosen ones. But there's one final thing that needs to be emphasized. If you're the chosen -- Paul has a way of driving home this point - - then act and behave like the chosen, and in this very text where he gives the ascription:

"Put on then, as God's chosen, holy and
beloved, garments of meekness, compassion
for one another - - "

....that means to believe one another.....that means to trust one another.

If you want to be sure that you're God's chosen , then one way may be to ask yourself the question, do I behave as one who has been chosen by God? If you want to worry about something.....worry about that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

November 27, 1966

"SOMEONE'S COMING: WHO?"

Today's sermon is the first in the Advent series that deals with the general theme, "Someone's Coming." The sermon title for today is "Someone's Coming: Who?" and the text is from the Gospel for the Day:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the Lord - - "

In the Christian sense, Advent never simply means coming. As any student of Latin can tell you that that's what the word does mean, yet for the Christian Advent means the coming of the Lord. It is never enough to say "Someone's coming." The Christian has the answer as to who it is who is coming.

Strange as it may seem, most of us are usually on tiptoe if we expect someone to come. We may be seated in the room, the telephone bell rings...

....doesn't the thought arise within your mind, could it be someone
calling for me?

The postman comes.....eagerly you reach for the mail, you thumb through one envelope after another....could it be that someone's calling for me by way of Uncle Sam's delivery?

When I was a student in Gettysburg....happy indeed, of course, is always the college student who by way of a respite can walk away from the dormitory and go down into the quiet of the village and just look around. We used to walk down, and there was the village square - - you've gone through Gettysburg, you recognize it at once.....the first time I walked down my eye caught some kind of a gadget, a device, on the second or third-story window above the

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store, and I wondered what it was, almost the size of one of these cameras either to the right or to the left. And my friend told me, well that's the kind of a device where the person who sits inside the window can tell who is passing down below or who is coming in this direction, and if she's seated there in her rocker, she might be able to have a minute or two to get herself ready, if perchance she recognizes somebody who might be coming to call on her.

Most of us run our way through life anticipating, expecting someone or something. So much of our attitude in life is determined by the things we expect, or the person we expect. For generation after generation ancient Israel was expecting Someone. They had been rooted and grounded in the faith that one day Someone would appear, the Promised One. The day of the Lord's appearing would occur. This is what Advent is telling us: the Lord will comethe day of the Lord will arrive.

Now we must ask ourselves the question: do we know the One for whom we should look? Do we really know who it is who is coming?

This is terribly, terribly important. For in the final analysis the Christian religion (note very carefully) does not just deal with a philosophy. The Christian religion is not just a way of life. The Christian religion does not just deal with a pattern for society....it is not basically a blue-print by the way people should order their living together. The Christian religion is not, first-off, an ideal or a set of virtues. She has contributed to all of these things, this Christian religion of ours, but basically, and to be properly and correctly understood, the Christian religion deals with the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian religion is the message of God. It's the con-

frontation with the world by God in Jesus Christ.

Now there are a lot of people who never understand, there are some people who simply think that to be a Christian is simply to be one who observes the Golden Rule. Now long before Jesus Christ came into the world there were standards for behavior among men. They did have a moral code, they did have a pattern for society, they did have a philosophy. Christianity's unique contribution does not lie in any one of these. Christianity's unique contribution lies in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is what we keep saying to ourselves as we get ready during Advent. This time of the year when we do our Christmas thinking early deals with the fact that God came to us in Jesus Christ.

Now even though He was talked about, even though there were those who heralded His coming, when He did come there were a lot of people who never recognized Him. And there are still a lot of people, two thousand years later, who haven't the slightest idea who He is. Even while He was here on earth, with that magnificent and that, shall we say it, magnetic personality of His, there were those who when they saw Him, whispered to one another, "Who is he?" "Who is he?" "Who is he?" When He made that great advent into Jerusalem, the last week that He spent on earth, the crowds heard the whisper going like a chain reaction..... "Who is he who comes?" - - the most important single question ever to be raised in the mind of man.

If you can't accept that now, life has its own way of zeroing in on you, and forcing you to come to grips with the question of questions: Who is Jesus Christ? There used to be a man, a wise man indeed, who went down into a college campus, a grand old soul. They branded him an eccentric. But when the incoming class came every September he was there, and he'd say, "Whatever you

boys figure out here in college, whatever you decide to become, let me ask you to remember that some day you've got to deal with Jesus Christ".....as much as to say, Get ready -- He's going to confront you in one way or another, and you'd better be prepared to know who He is when that confrontation occurs.

You don't have to be a theologian to talk language like this. Life itself has a way of confronting people with the fact of God. Even John the Baptist, who had told so much about the coming of Jesus Christ, from prison raised the question: Who are you? Are you the one really to come, or should we look for somebody else?.....so deep-seated in the mind of man is the fact that there must be Someone. The Christian Church during Advent says God has promised the advent of His Son. Who is He?

For the purpose of this sermon this morning will you allow me to do something that I admit I am the first to admit.....it's very, very naive, and with all your learning and with all your sophistication you may be unwilling to accept the proposal. But as for me, I have no alternative -- I know who I am -- I am a proclaimer of the Good Word, and I am in duty bound to give my life to the answering of this question: Who is Jesus Christ?

Who is Jesus Christ? For the answer I propose that you must go where I must go -- to the Good Book. We Lutherans, you know, root and ground ourselves in the Faith scripturally. What we preach and teach we get from here. Is it too naive really to suggest that we allow the Bible to give the answer to the question? Is it too naive to suggest that we first allow God Himself to give the answer? -- God who is Jesus Christ?

God's answer is given, and one day there was a voice from Heaven that said, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." This is God's esti-

mate of Jesus Christ. You want to know who Jesus is? Consider what God says He is - - "He is my son, and in him I am well pleased"the Divine Imprimatur placed upon Jesus Christ.

" in whom He is pleased"

....it takes a great deal to please God. How well we sinners know it! Then one day God should point to someone and say, "I am pleased."

....God is perfection! ...God is completion!

.....God is never less than God!

God says of this wandering, itinerant carpenter's son:

"Look - - in him I am pleased. He is My Son."

Small wonder, then, that when the creed-makers come on the scene, you get them putting it in this classic, unforgettable language.....

.....let me pose for a prophet, let me predict that as long as

man can think, as long as man can read, as long as man

can speak, he'll go on saying something like this,

thinking of Jesus Christ:

" . . . Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father . . . "

It all goes back to the day when the Voice was heard, "He is my beloved Son; in him I am pleased."

Then let me be equally naive and suggest that you allow Jesus Christ to speak for Himself. Who are you, Jesus?

Let me suggest quite parenthetically now, that this is a very difficult thing, you know, to let people speak for themselves. Usually we come to them, we put words in their mouths, we hear them say what we think they ought to say.

Ours is the generation of the image-maker. We have our idea of people, so when they begin to speak, they say only what we think they ought to be saying. This is the great problem in inter-personal relations.....two people confront each other; one person carries along in the recess of his mind a notion that he has of that other person that stems from something that was said or done seven or eight years ago. Now, seven or eight years later, he never really hears the person -- all he sees is the person as over against this image that he carries around. This is the problem between parents and youngsters -- the most difficult thing in the world sometimes for a parent is to hear his teenager, son or daughter, speak for himself. Sometimes we never give them credit enough for some degree of maturation. And equally difficult is the problem of the youngster with his parents -- to be cursed with the common saying that's held by teenagers, "Well, my parents just don't understand me.".....and the teenager brings this image to his parents. And sometimes the teenager won't stand still long enough to let the parent lay bare his soul. This is the great problem.

This is why I am so delighted now that I can suggest for you what has satisfied my mind, that in dealing with Jesus Christ, let Him speak for Himself! And in the study of the Fourth Gospel you come into these very precious "Ego eimi" -- the "I AM" sayings. Part of the weakness of our day and generation is that with our new liberalism and our new humanism we've raised up a crop of theologians whose basic weakness is this: that with all of their learning they superimpose upon God their own ideas of what God is; and even in dealing with Jesus Christ it's high time that we allowed Jesus Christ to speak for Himself. Who are you, Jesus?

Who is He who comes? See Him through His own eyes. And in the Fourth Gospel you have Jesus saying:

.... "I am the Bread of Life"

....."I am the Light of the world"

...."I am the Door" "I am the Vine"

...."I am the Good Shepherd"

...!"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"

.... "I am the Resurrection and the Life"

This is the one who has come! Look no farther, my friend.

I have lived long enough to know that there are some people whose lives have been changed because of someone who came into their lives. This is the miracle and the marvel of personality, that one individual can have so great influence upon the life of another person. To be encountered by Jesus Christ is to be encountered by the fact of God which is a life-changing fact and force. He who comes is no less than God. And He who comes as God comes as the Saviour of mankind. In the prophecy of Ezekiel one reads: "Behold I, I myself will both seek my people and save them." This is He who comes. He is no less than God. He is your Saviour.

When He first came, by far the greater part of them (almost all of them to a man) missed Him. And there are those who maintain that when He was so completely rejected (crucified is the cruel and correct term), it was only because they really didn't know who He was. But the awesome and wonderful fact remains that He who once came to Palestine some 2,000 years ago is 'in every way as alive and active in the world of today.' Come now, don't you think we'd better make it our business to find out just who He is?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SOMEONE'S COMING: WHEN?"

This year's Advent series of sermons is based upon the general theme, "Someone's Coming." Today's sermon bears the title, "Someone's Coming: When?" The text is from the Gospel for the day, the 21st chapter of Luke, the 28th verse:

"And when these things begin to come to pass,
then look up, lift up your heads, for your
redemption is drawing near."

Those of us who had the good fortune to grow up in a small town have a way of allowing other people never to forget it. The older we become, the more frequently do we have our nostalgic moments, and with charity you have allowed this one person in particular to give you repeated references to those days in a small town.

One of the things that occurred to us as a group of youngsters, what a delightful experience it would be if we could visit one another's churches. And so on a Sunday evening, it happened so very naturally, that after Luther League a group of us Lutheran youngsters crossed the street and we went to the Methodist church. It was always a pleasant experience, maybe because of the company that we kept....Dale, Carleton and Mary Louise were delightful folk. And then there was Ken. It was Ken's father who was the Methodist preacher.

He was a dynamic preacher, cultured....his sermons were chuckfull of illustrations. And when he began his pastorate in that small town he fascinated his people by introducing a "little sermon" as he called it, before the main sermon of the day; and that little sermon was especially designed to capture the minds and the hearts of the children who were present. Very cleverly, however, he didn't give them the whole sermon on one Sunday. He gave it

to them serial-fashion (something like the days of Pearl White -- you remember?)....and when he'd get them to that very breath-taking moment he'd stop and say, "Now you think about this and we'll pick it up next Sunday from this point."

But the strangest of all things remains....to this very day I don't remember a single illustration that he used. And I don't remember a single point in his sermons. But from those frequent treks to the Methodist church there was an indelible factor impressed upon the mind of this one person, and that deals with the truth of the Gospel, that holds my soul in good stead, now and I am confident until the day that I breathe my last.

Mark you well, it wasn't anything that the preacher said! It was something that I saw. For there in that Methodist church, above the pulpit platform (that's what they called the chancel area)...was a painting, a symbolic interpretation of Jesus Christ in the moment of the Ascension. This heroic-size figure of Jesus, with clouds at His feet and clouds above Him being ascended into Heaven.

You know by this time that I fervently believe in the use of symbolism. The church has always dealt with this, and wisely so, because someone has said, "it's the eye gate through which God sometimes enters best." And the eye is the gate by which sometimes the truth of the Gospel is firmly implanted in our minds. So these symbolic features of the church that surround us in this place, hopefully perhaps in years to come that you might look back and remember a profound truth portrayed for you through a symbol.

Well this interpretation of Jesus Christ, standing there, ascending up into Heaven, made its mark upon me, and I went to the Scriptures. Because one day I said to preacher Hines, "What's that all about?" And he said,

"That's Jesus ascending into Heaven." And even then with a curiosity I turned to the Bible, and the fundamental fact of the Ascension that I cherish to this very day was the voice that was proclaimed from Heaven:

"Why stand ye here idle? This same Jesus
that you see ascending up into Heaven
shall one day come again in glory."

So this is what the picture said to me. It isn't that once upon a time He ascended -- it's the truth that He who ascended will come.

The Church itself is always talking about this. We've written it into our creeds. You've already gone on record at this service as believing -- remember how you said it....."and He will come again to judge both the quick and the dead" -- --"He will come again."

We're fortunate that we belong to the church that has the tradition of Advent; because what are we spelling out in Advent except the glorious truth that Jesus Christ is coming? We shan't allow you to celebrate Christmas without saying to you first-off: here are four weeks in which the truth of Advent must be implanted in your minds.....this fundamental truth of the coming of Jesus Christ must be established clearly.

Now, when people talk about Advent, they're not always clear as to what they mean by it. For whatever the name may mean to you, let me suggest that Advent means at least three things, and they're all part of the total story.

First off, Advent means He came. It's been established -- historically so -- that the incarnation did occur! -- that God did come in Jesus Christ, born of Mary. This is a comforting thing, to know that God could break through to us, and that God already has given His complete and perfect

revelation.....so much so that one who looked back with real spiritual sensitivity could say, "in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell."

Advent means He came.

Advent means He who came - comes! There's a Christian Christmas sentiment for you.....He who came - comes! That means Jesus Christ is coming now! God is the God of the present tense. In the Chapel of the Grateful Heart this morning a handful of us, as is our custom, gathered together to pray. One of the things that we said to ourselves, "Where two or three are gathered together -- I am there." The Christian's soul is made steadfast in a promise that Jesus Christ himself made when He said: "Lo, I am with you -- always." That means now. This is the precious thing of the Gospel.

It would be a sad thing if whenever you talked about the fact of Jesus Christ you talked about something that happened in the long, long ago and said, "He came." Or if when you talked about Jesus Christ you looked into the future -- very remote, and say, "He will come". What comfort, now is there really in the thought if you have only to look back, or only to scan the horizon of the future and say, "He will." To be able to say, He is coming now.....He is here.

Why don't you call anything and everything by its rightful name in the Christian faith? Such as: your coming together here and now is a recognition of the truth that God is here. Jesus Christ comes to us through the church. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, isolated, separated. Why don't you call things by their rightful name? You're here because you honestly believe that Jesus Christ is present now. What is the Church but the gathered? -- the called-out-of -- into the fellowship of the Body of Christ?

Call it by its rightful name -- you're here, properly speaking, because God in Christ has summoned you! And every time you allow any kind of separation to keep you from the Body of Christ you are ignoring the summons of Christ himself. This is why we must guard our minds, this is why we must restrain our prejudices. This is why we must take our souls to task. For it's Jesus Christ who comes to us through His Church.

It is Jesus Christ who calls us to come together. And it's folly to believe that He who summons us would not Himself be present! If He calls you to keep an appointment, He himself will be here! Not to come, and to alienate yourself from the fellowship, is to ignore the heed, the call of Him who calls you. Even in the Sacrament of the Altar, what do we say? Christ is present, He comes to us. We're not talking about something that happened two thousand years ago now. We're talking, not about trying to get some kind of comfort from something that's yet to occur. It's happening now. With all the ardor of my soul I believe that Jesus Christ is making His rightful claim of love upon your soul, in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the fellowship of the redeemed, in the declaration of eternal truth....now. Call it by its rightful name -- you've come because you've heard the summons of God -- today.

By the same token, when you talk of Advent you have a right to believe that He who once came will also come in glory and power and in regal splendor. When you talk about Advent you talk about three things, and you never can leave out the one, or two. He came....He comes....He will come again.

When He first came, you know....shall we use the word, one hesitates to use it -- He came in somewhat disguised fashion!

...disguised as a baby

....disguised as a carpenter's son

....disguised as an itinerant preacher

....disguised in their flesh, and even His fore-runner could

say, "There stands among you one whom you do not recognize!"

But when He comes again -- Scriptures allows us to believe that when He comes again we'll know it! He'll come as King above all kings and Lord above all lords, with power and might, to establish His Kingdom.

Now the question remains: when does He come; when will He come. We know when He came. But when now does He come?

I most earnestly believe that He comes when you get ready. He can't break down the barriers of your heart. He himself arbitrarily will not rip away the devices that you've erected which come as alienation between Him and you. But when they disappear, through your anticipation of His love, He comes.

And when does He come? Can I put it for you this way: when you report not only for worship but when you also report for duty. Any time and every time a member of this congregation or you as an individual believer, rather, travels the Bookville Road and engage in a home study project in the Lyttonsville area -- Jesus Christ is coming because of the performance of your Christian duty. Every time you perform an act of Christian compassion, out of pure and holy love, and the regard for another single soul, Jesus Christ is coming.

You ask me, then, when He comes? -- when you make your heart ready for His appearing....when you report for duty, when you allow yourself to become a kind of incarnation.....

"Ah, dearest Jesus, Holy Child,
(this is the perfect Christmas prayer)

Make thee a bed, soft undefiled,
Within my heart - - "

Now as to this long look - - when will He come again in regal
splendor, to establish His Kingdom here on earth?

I can't tell you. I don't know.....now.

Going back again to my home town.....old Jake English knew. Jake
was an eccentric. For years he ran this grocery store alongside of his
house, and occasionally he'd invite some of us youngsters over to his room,
and then he'd put down in front of us huge books, so it seemed to us as young-
sters, and on these books were pages of all kinds of diagrams and descriptions,
all kinds of charts.....and then there would be a kind of strange look in his
eye and he'd say, "This is the exact time"....and then he'd give us a figure to
which you could turn on the page of the calendar. Why, even as a youngster I
knew Jake was wrong! For what he was saying was not scripturally true....the
Scriptures say, "Not even the angels in heaven know the precise time."

And you know, don't you, that it's part of the folly of man to in-
sist on precise answers from God. Do we not therefore imply that God is in
duty bound to satisfy us chiefly on our level of inquiry, and I could add, on
our idle curiosity. It's enough to know that He who breaks into our little
world does so according to His own wisdom. For us to know exactly when could
be a matter of lesser importance. The important thing is to know that He is
going to come, and then to allow ourselves a mood of expectancy.

Alvin Rogness has an interesting illustration. He tells about two

men waiting at a railroad station and each was expecting the distinguished visitor. They knew that this distinguished visitor was going to come to their town. And happily they met -- until -- the one said, "I tell you, he's going to come on the 8:00 o'clock train." And the other one said, "No, I'm confident he's going to come on the 10:30 train." And so they began to argue. And the more they waxed hot in their argumentation, the less enthusiasm they had, the less joy in the prospect that he was going to come at all. So I have little patience with people, like my friend Jake English, even though he was an old man, who became terribly impatient with other people because they wouldn't believe him when he told us how God was going to come again, according to Jake English's plan.

The important thing is this: as someone has said, "All history is going somewhere and the hand of God is in it." If you can't settle for this interpretation of the ascension of Jesus Christ as a human figure and then as the return of God in splendor in Christ -- if when you think of the second coming you want to cancel all of that out, here's one thing you can't cancel out: that God acts in history, God is involved in history, God is involved in His world, God will always be present.....and that somehow, in and through all that's happening is God.

Jesus Christ told those people. He said, "These are the things that are going to happen. When they happen, I'll be in it, and I'll come through it."

You won't like this now. He didn't give very good news. He talked about those fearful signs, and the sun and the moon and the stars. He talked about the earth quaking. He talked about famine. He said, "All these things are going to happen. And if you want a sign, then take this for a sign, be-

cause in such upheaval and in such unsettlement, even in such destruction, I will appear."

For me, my soul is fairly at tiptoe in anticipation of the second coming. The nature and the character of it I can't fully tell you. But it's enough for me to expect that He'll come. And I think my soul would shrivel up and die if I should deny myself the mood of expectancy. We live by the things that we expect to happen, and we never live in a deeper sense than when we're firmly convinced that the things that we expect to happen will always be tied up somehow with the hand and the purpose of God.

Beloved, if you came here this morning expecting something...expecting God, you came with an advantage that the person did not have who did not come expectantly. If you're living out the balance of your days and your years expecting that somehow God will always be part of it...You have a decided advantage. It's wonderful to always expect something good. And it's never more wonderful, this experience of expectancy, than when you're expecting God.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SOMEONE'S COMING: SO WHAT?"

Today's sermon is next-to-the-last in this year's Advent series, which is based upon the general theme, "Someone's Coming"; it bears the title, "Someone's Coming: So What?" The text is from the Gospel for the day, the 5th verse of the 11th chapter of Matthew:

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them."

G. Bromley Oxnam, distinguished Methodist Bishop and their shining light of a few years ago, came to Gettysburg Seminary to deliver the main address at one of our convocations. His presentation was unique. He began by dangling in front of us a series of illustrations that were never quite complete. The adjective is important - - a series of illustrations that were never quite complete. He began and took us in this direction, then he stopped.... then he began in another direction, took us there for a while, stopped....never completed the story. His basic theme was Probability, but he never told us what the outcome was.

This seemed to go on rather endlessly, even though it was but a comparatively short period of time. And it occurred to some of us that as he was speaking he began to lose us one by one, a kind of collective "settling-down" characterized his audience, and before we were aware of it, a "so what?" mentality possessed us.....as much as to say, well, why listen to this, now, because he's not going to complete it anyway. He had a particular purpose in mind in doing that. But in the preparation of this sermon I could not help but

think of Bromley Oxnam and his series of incomplete illustrations -- allowing an audience to settle down to a "so what?" mentality.....why give him any more attention? -- he won't complete the action -- he won't tell you how the story ought to end and could end.

As I read today's Gospel lesson I said to myself, that was John the Baptist for you! He was afflicted by a "so what?" mentality. As I prepared this sermon for today, next-to-the-last in the Advent series, I could not help but say to myself, -- Advent, 1966 is to be understood against a "so what?" mentality throughout the world. No matter how ardently we who love Him talk about His coming, there are going to be any number of people in different places who are going to react by saying "So what?"....."What difference will his coming make?"

May I suggest that you prepare for the sermon before you get to church. There are two things that make for a good sermon from the human point of view...

....oh, you're not forgetting that it's always the Holy Spirit that's the preacher, it's not the human figure.....the human figure is but the vessel, and of course, how well you know it, it's always a vessel of clay.....but the real preacher is always God, coming through whatever channels we make at His disposal....

...but now, from a human point of view, there are two things essential for the preaching of a sermon.

One is that the preacher himself should prayerfully prepare, and earnestly so, what he's going to declare to you as Gospel.

And the second thing is that you who make up the hearers should prepare

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for what's being preached. You should bring a receptive mind, you should prayerfully anticipate God breaking through to you with His Gospel, with the preaching of the word. And then, if at all possible, read in advance the Scriptural setting for the sermon. That's one reason why we send you SAINT LUKE MESSENGER, that you might note perhaps, on the worship page, the title of the sermon and the text, and that you might read the text in advance, and not only the text, but also see it in its proper context. Had you done that, my friend, at this point immediately you'd have a far better understanding as to what this sermon is all about, and its historical setting. Maybe I'd better fill you in.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. In God's plan, He had put His finger upon John and He said, 'John, you're to go ahead of Christ, you're to spread the word, you're the one who is to tell people that the day of the Lord is coming.'

So John took his task seriously. He preached hell-fire and damnation, he did. He scared people, he frightened them....in fact, one time he greeted his congregation -- how's this for a salutation to a people assembled: "You generation of vipers - - who got the word to you?" So effective was his preaching that he could talk like that! Then he'd even reached the place where he said, The one I am talking about is already here! He who is to come has come!" His work was done so effectively that he so pointed to Christ that people began to follow Christ and no longer follow John the Baptist.

Now the announcer of Jesus Christ, the man who had believed in Him so earnestly, finds himself in jail. Now it wasn't just an ordinary jail. It was a dungeon, a place of imprisonment below the castle area; and he could hear

up above in the castle rooms the wicked king, making merry, the same king who would give way to the evil design of an evil woman and allow John the Baptist -- cause him, to be beheaded. As though he senses all of this impending doom and fate, he finds himself imprisoned -- out there is Jesus Christ!

.....now given to dispondency, now characterized by impatience....

.....isolated that he is, should I also add, maybe
disillusioned? -- he gets this "so what?" mentality.....

..."I said Jesus was coming - - where has it gotten me?

....I said Jesus is coming -- where is the Kingdom being established?

..surely there's no change in Rome...surely there's no
change in Jerusalem....surely there's no change in society
as such....so I said he was coming - - so what?"

This "so what?" mentality has been around for a long time. It's present even now. There are those who are students of history, even as one who sat around our dinner table last evening, engaging us in conversation, said, "Why, isn't it a matter of fact that ever since we have had recorded history we haven't been able to muster up a period of time, accumulative at that, that would go so far as fifty years when we have been without war, when we have been free from hostilities." Christianity's been around now for a long time. No wonder they say to us "so what?"

Students of history bring to our attention that the only two wars in history that have ever been known as "world" wars had their origin, so-called, within Christian civilization, out of so-called "Christian" Europe. So they say to us "so what?".....as much as to indicate: "Dangle in front of us no more incomplete illustrations".....as much as to say, "Don't tell us any more

about something that smacks of peace and love and good will when history can't produce, and when you Christians yourselves can't fulfill so noble a dream."

Ah, this "so what?" mentality prevails not only among the community of nations, not only as you turn the pages of a history book, but also isn't it true in your relationship with individual people? She may have forgotten it, but I haven't: it was a member of this congregation who told me about her relationship with a woman, was she in her late 60's? - who had lived all of those years without Jesus Christ.....and then conversion set in. She became, in the latter years of her life, a convert to Jesus Christ. And as she was talking with the member of this parish, the member of this congregation somehow revealed to her something far less than Christian in her attitude and in her thinking. And her friend said to her, "Why, I've only been a Christian for a few days, and I had hoped for something more than this from Christians! You've been a Christian all of your life, and you can still think and talk like this!" What is her friend revealing but a "so what?" mentality?

....Jesus is coming!

....shrug of the shoulders - - "so what?"

From a purely human point of view, digress for a moment, will you? Think what that must have meant to Jesus Christ, to have John the Baptist send an emissary to Him and say, "Jesus, are you for real?" The question has basic integrity: "Jesus, should we look for somebody else?" That's where a "so what?" mentality can take you, when you apply it to Jesus Christ.

What does Jesus Christ do when He's confronted by a "so what?" mentality? Well, first off, Jesus Christ is one who knew what is in man. Ah, that's what

they used to say about Him, and why don't you and I go on saying it: He knows what is in man. And so Jesus Christ could fully appreciate the fact that these are the things that had happened to John the Baptist.....

....separated from believers, isolated in a dungeon, he succumbs to bitterness. Also, he did not have the good fortune to be closely related to Jesus Christ -- he wasn't walking with Him hand-in-hand -- he wasn't always there when these wonderful things were happening. And because he wasn't there when they were happening, he allowed himself to believe that they weren't happening at all!

You know, this is a terrible thing about us. If we don't see the good that's being done, or if perchance the good doesn't happen to us, then we foolishly think that there's no good being done anywhere. But Jesus Christ, knowing the nature of man, deals patiently with John the Baptist and his "so what?" mentality, and having enough basic faith in his own integrity and the way the Kingdom comes, He simply said, "Go back and tell John what you see --

....there's a blind man who couldn't see -- now he has sight!

....there was a lame man who couldn't walk -- now he's fully able!

...there was a man who had a leprous condition -- now he's cleansed!" He didn't say to John, "Focus your sights on Jerusalem, focus your sights on Rome"....He didn't say, "Look at the blue-print for society -- a new social order -- it's just around the horizon."

....He said: "Look at the change that's taking place in certain people, from the inside out."

You ask me how I know He's coming. Is it evidence you must have? Look, then, where the disadvantaged have been. See the difference, the life-chang-

ing difference He's making there. His coming always makes a change in people...
...a change for the better!

Let me lay bare my soul to you at this point. Every now and then there are those who come to me as a Pastor and despair of the slowness of the coming of the Kingdom, who severely and outspokenly criticise the work of this congregation. It happens every now and then -- that we're not making giant-like strides.

When I know the basic integrity of a certain number of people who make up membership in this congregation, I feel such criticism is unfair. And the only thing that brings courage and comfort to my heart is to remember people like.....shall I start pointing my finger, and letting my finger come in your direction, when I think of the transformation that has taken place in your life, when you've been encountered by Jesus Christ.....you who were the crippled soul, you whose heart was stained by sin -- and I've seen the cleansing grace at work.

And the most salutary antidote that I've yet to discover is instead of staying at my desk, or even lingering on my knees, I get up and I go out, and I visit here and I visit there, where I see the direct grace of God being made effective in an individual's life, where I know within the membership of this congregation there are those who are being to other people as Jesus Christwith no trumpets before them! I think of the call that I made, when I visited in a nursing home, and it was a member of our congregation being ministered to, and would you believe me, would you understand, when I say, from a physical standpoint, I found every minute that I stayed there almost offensive, and I couldn't wait until I got out. And in that situation, in that condition,

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a grand and noble soul, in her late sixties -- who knows, perhaps in her middle seventies.....who gave me to understand when I talked to her that she's doing this in the name of Jesus Christ. She herself had been disadvantaged once. Christ came into her life, and the Kingdom of God is established in her heart.

You ask me how I know He's come? It's evidence that you want?

....I think of her.

....dare I think of you?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"UNMISTAKABLY GOD"

Text: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest
upon him -- "

(Isaiah 11:2)

The lesson is from the prophecy of Isaiah, who fore-told what God had in mind for His people. The text speaks specifically to the point of an undefeatable God whose plan of salvation can neither be deterred nor destroyed.

Even the introductory verse talks about a shoot coming out of a stump -- of Jesse, no less. David's line, if you please.

And what does that mean?

It means that despite the sinfulness of our nature, God still prefers to work through us even as His perfect work is done in us and for us. David was the gross sinner, God's beloved, even as his name indicates. But salvation comes -- comes through him. Through our sinfulness, mark you, God is made unmistakably plain. He who comes comes as a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

It took year after year, generation after generation until the day would arrive. But through all this unfolding of time God is unmistakably at work and for the discerning eye His hand can be seen. It may take time, that is to say God may take more time than we'd be pleased to allow Him, but what God does is done well and always in the fulness of time, that when it does occur, it's unmistakably God.

That's why in the day of realization those who came knelt, those who came worshipped, those who came brought their gifts. The manger-born, as promised, was unmistakably God.

"SOMEONE'S COMING: WHERE?"

Today's sermon is the last in the Advent series. It bears the title: "Someone's Coming: Where?" The text is from the Gospel for the day; it's the 26th verse of the 1st chapter of John:

"There stands one among you whom
you do not know."

At first blush the preacher must have been quite excited, for he discovered in his congregation a delegation, a delegation that tarried after he had finished speaking. They came up to engage him in conversation. But the longer he talked with them the more perturbed he became, because he discovered that what they were trying to do was to put the preacher on the defensive, to ascertain just what his qualifications were, what right he had to stand up and to speak. "After all, who are you, anyway?"

The more he listened to them, the more he entertained their questions, the more irritated, undoubtedly, John the Baptist became. Because it occurred to them that they were talking beside the point...they were doing a great deal of shadow-boxing. For when it's all said and done, the important thing is never the preacher; the important thing is always the proclamation of the Gospel. It is the message that is primary; the messenger is incidental.well, that was one thing that bothered him.

And then, over and above that, was the fact that it occurred to him that right there in their midst was Jesus Christ, and they didn't know it. Why should they talk about John the Baptist when Jesus was there? Why should they become fascinated by his personality -- and he was something different! -- when right there in their very midst was God in Jesus Christ!

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So, presumably, he took them to task when he said, "Why, there is standing right here in the midst of you one that you do not know. And I want to tell you one thing about it -- I'm not even worthy to untie the string of his sandal." You get the point, don't you? They were talking about everything else except what they ought to be talking about in the presence of Jesus Christ....and what is more, being unaware of the fact that He was there.

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Come now, why do you suppose it was like that? What is there about us, that we can become so blind to the very presence of God? Ask any man, anywhere, presumably speaking, and he'll tell you that he wants God, he would like to become more aware of God. He'll tell you that he needs God. But why are we so frequently so blind to His nearness? God is the God who reveals Himself. This is one of the priceless truths of the Christian Gospel, that in Jesus Christ all the fulness of God dwells! -- that's the way Paul put it, don't forget it -- you can't say it any better than that. So God has come to us in Christ. Christ was right there, and they didn't know it.

There are some people who complain because they say, "We look for God and we never find Him." For centuries they had been talking about the One who was to come. In every Jewish home it was table conversation, it was one of the things that were supposed to talk about at night when they went to sleep -- "one day the Lord would appear." They kept talking about the day of the Lord's appearing, they kept talking about the promised Messiah. Why, they even tell us when a Jewish mother would give birth to her child and she'd be told that her baby was a boy, she'd offer a prayer, a prayer that

went something like this: "If it please Thee, O Jehovah God, maybe this boy will be the promised one, the Messiah to redeem Israel." For centuries they had been looking for someone. You'd think that when He would arrive they'd recognize Him, wouldn't you? No wonder John the Baptist, the preacher, was irritated and annoyed....."He's standing right here, and you don't even know it."

Are you having trouble finding God? Well, disabuse yourself at once of any notion that He's playing hide-and-seek. The god of the pagans might be like that. Pagans will tell you that their god hides himself -- they're never quite sure what he's going to do -- they're never quite sure where he's going to show up next, as though he has a peculiar kind of delight in running away from people, showing himself for a while, and then concealing himself.

Well, God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a God like that. He's always coming to us. He's always sending out signals, He's always making it easier for us to believe, He's always giving us -- shall I use the word? -- gracious hints, intimations, of where He's to be found. And if you're having trouble finding God, don't blame Him! It could be that you're not looking for Him where He wants most to be found! Has it ever occurred to you that God is wherever need is to be met. Maybe they didn't know where to look for God because they didn't know the kind of God for which to look! If you know what you're to look for, you might know where to look. So let's ask the question, who is this God who comes?

The answer immediately must be given. The God who comes is no different than the God who is in Heaven. There are not two Gods, one God for Heaven and one God for earth. God is one, and the God who came to earth is the God

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who in Heaven has all the characteristics of love and truth - - - there you have it! What is the basic nature and characteristic of God, the God who comes? He is love. He is truth. God is never less than God, God is never less than truth, God is never less than love! Keep saying this to yourself over and over again: He who comes is love -- He who comes is truth. Well then, look where you expect to find love and truth at work, or look where love and truth is at work, whether you expect it or not. That was their problem - - they never seemed quite fully to understand that the God who comes would be a God coming to meet the needs of people, in love and in truth.

Winifred has her moments of nostalgia at this particular time of the year, for the farm in which she grew up, those 140 acres up there in north central Pennsylvania.....moments of nostalgia when she remembers that Christmas a number of years ago when they were snowbound -- had no contact with the outside world. They tunnelled a kind of a path from the farm-house to the barn so they could do the chores, but otherwise that was the extent of their relationship with the world beyond the farm-house. There, snowbound, not being able to give attention to last-minute shopping, practically every gift that was given that year within the confines of that farm-house family were gifts that they made by themselves and gave to one another. Everything that was spread on the table for Christmas dinner they had garnered from their own store-houses, their own resources. No wonder she has nostalgia for a day like that! Even though there have been wonderful Christmases since, there's never been a Christmas quite like that!

When she has her nostalgia she remembers this place and that place, and then eventually in the conversation we may talk about the ice house, a few steps away from the summer kitchen, a kind of shed, 8 by 10 feet. In winter-

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time her dad went with the wagon, down to the creek bed...there he sawed the ice, brought it back, stacked it in the sawdust, hopefully to last until mid-summer. All of this is reminiscent when they were filling an ice house, perhaps not hers, but one like it, with sawdust. And one of the helpers lost his watch in the process.....to look for a watch in heaps of sawdust! Clever and ingenious chap that he was, he asked everybody to leave the ice house. And then he got down, pressed his ear as closely to the sawdust pile as he could....and then he kept listening for the ticking of his watch. The basic nature and characteristic of his watch -- it was a ticking instrument..... knowing what he was looking for, he then discovered where to look, until he found it. A homespun illustration, to be sure, but you get the point! The basic nature and characteristic of God is love and truth. You want to know where to look for Him, then? Look then where love and truth are at work, and they are always at work where need is being met.

Where to look for Him? Be prepared to look for Him in unexpected places....

....who would ever have thought to look for God in a feeding trough for a donkey on a winter's night? But there was a baby -- a baby in need of love, protection, care. God was at work, in a maiden pure, and in a devoted father. There is need.....all the love and truth of God is at work in a donkey feeding trough.....

where to look for God?

....who would ever have looked for Him in that carpenter's shop in Nazareth?...where a teenage youngster -- go ahead and

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use the expression....where a teenage youngster, dark-haired, dark-eyed, olive-skinned, was growing up. And He never quite took his eye off of Joseph the master carpenter, observing him, how with faithfulness he performed his day's work....

...listening to the kind of conversation that went on as Joseph directed it in that carpenter shop. Then one day, the teenager having become a man, an itinerant preacher, people came to Him and said, "Tell us more about God -- what is He like?" And the first word that came to the lips of the teenager-now-become-a-man said, "He's like a father." Jesus remembers how as a teenager Joseph met the need in His life, the need that only a father could meet!

...who would ever have thought to look for God in a carpenter's shop, with a teenager adoring a man named Joseph?

....there was Jacob's well.....one day a woman came to draw water. There was the stranger. She was the woman with the past, and all of her sins kept coming back in front of her. Then this stranger talked to her. She laid bare her soul to Him, and before she knew it, a whole new life was opened up!

...who would ever have thought of looking for God in the soul of a man who talked with a woman with a past, gave her new life. She had need, need to be saved. And God was there -- love and truth in Him.

...a handful of men, gathered together in an upper room,

where so much was going on in Jerusalem....then He takes bread and He takes a cup of wine....

....who would ever have thought to look for God at a time like that, in a place like that. But these men had need! -- need to be sustained, need to be assured that Jesus Christ would always be truly present....that in Him there would be life, and life everlasting....

....outside the city walls...two thieves being crucified... one of them has need in his dying moments for a Saviour, one says "Remember me"....and God in Jesus Christ -- love and truth -- the need of a dying man....

...who would ever have thought to look for God in the heart of a condemned man dying on a cross? But there was need.....love and truth were at work.

I reach this time of the year especially for one certain book on my shelves, Martin Luther's Christmas Book. Roland Bayton has done an excellent thing for us, allowing Luther in a naive kind of way to tell us what was going through the minds of Mary and Joseph, Herod, the shepherds, the wise men. And then he reveals for us in his own way the kind of conversation that takes place among the Germans who would be reading what he is saying, and he could well picture how there would be people saying, "Oh, if only I would have been there, I would not have treated Jesus the way the innkeeper did. I would not have treated Jesus the way wicked King Herod did. I would have been the first to have run and get water for the baby Jesus.....I would have been the first to protect him from the elements...."

....and Martin Luther shook that stubborn German finger of his, irritated and annoyed, and said, "Why do you talk this way? Talk like that only when you are the first to run to meet the need of a neighbor's child."

Looking for God, are you? I'll tell you where He is to be found: wherever need is being met, wherever love and truth are at work. Martin Luther said it in a very grand way when he said, "Herein shall we know that the birth of Jesus Christ is made effective in us, if we take upon ourselves the need of another."

They used to tell about the man who was sent down to the railroad village station to meet the visitor coming to town. And the chap said, "But how will I know who he is?" And the man said, "Well, if you're delayed and you don't get there until after the train has arrived, just look around in the station for a tall man helping somebody."

Looking for God, are you? Wherever need is being met, wherever love and truth become incarnate. Can you think of a better way in which to be found?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SOMEONE'S COMING: WHY?"

On each of the Sundays preceding this day we followed the general theme that "Someone Is Coming." In connection with the general theme there was the question that was asked. Will you permit this title for today's sermon: "Someone's Coming: Why?"

The text -- a strange sort of text, I'll frankly admit at once, for Christmas Day. Because the text comes right out of the heart of the last week that our Blessed Lord spent here on earth. The text is part of the theme in the story of the arrest, the betrayal, the denial, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It's the 37th verse of the 18th chapter of John:

"Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world . . ."

Are you at all impressed with the fact that the Gospel writers, once they had mentioned the birth of Jesus Christ, seldom if ever went back and referred to it again? Are you impressed with the fact that even in the entire New Testament writings, writings of those other than the Gospel recorders, that little if anything is said here about the nature and the character of the birth of Jesus Christ.

We're indebted so much to Matthew, we're indebted so much to Luke, for the very beautiful way in which each of them tells the story, how the birth of Jesus occurred. But even the fourth writer, that is, the writer of the fourth Gospel, John, tells about the coming of Jesus into the world in strange-sound-

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ing language...."In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He doesn't say anything about a manger scene, he doesn't mention the shepherds, he doesn't mention the star -- only Matthew talks about wise men, we call them the three kings. That this should be the fact should cause us to pause, to ponder, and to wonder. The purpose served by this sermon today is an expression of one man's concern for this truth, that once the birth of Jesus Christ was introduced, by Matthew and by Luke, seldom again is the mysterious strand picked up.

I propose to tell you why I think this is so.

If you were given the assignment to write a biography of a man, where would you begin it? What do you think is the most important thing by which to introduce the facts of a man's life?

Some people like to begin with the circumstances of his birth. I'm not so sure that that's the best place at which to begin. Oddly enough, if I were given the assignment to write the account of a man's life, I think I'd begin with his last days. I'd like to see him in all the fulness of his stature. And then I'd look from that point backward, and happily enough, if I could do it, I think I'd like to begin somewhere with the mid-point in the man's life, the point when there was the dawning of maturation, when suddenly it would occur to a person just who he is, and to what end he was born. That's why, I told you a number of sermons ago, I treasure what I carry around in my wallet....not a series of credit cards, not a series of identification -- important as this may be for the way one lives in this kind of society....but it's a handwritten note, written for me by somebody who was impressed, first-off, by the reference that appears in "Pages in a Diary" in today's bulletin.....that

there are two great moments in the life of any man: the moment when he is born, and then the time when he discovers why he was born.

It is never enough to talk about the fact that Jesus Christ came into the world. It's never enough to tell the story in all its wondrous fashion. But you and I are in duty bound to say, What is the meaning of this? - Why did He come?

Seldom appreciated as it ought to be appreciated is that moment in the life of our Lord when the heavens part, and a Voice from Heaven is heard saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him - "the moment when the Divine Imprimatur is placed upon Jesus Christ. Bible students don't always agree, and it doesn't cause me too much trouble that they shan't, as to just when it was that Jesus Christ was fully aware of the meaning of His life. There are those who tell us it was a continuous, a gradual revelation, until at the time of His baptism the full mark of God was made plain to Him.

I shan't worry too much as to just when and where and how, in the life of Jesus Christ, it occurred to Him that His mission was like the mission of none other. Maybe there might be somebody who would say He never said it better than when He appeared before Pontius Pilate and said, "To this end was I born" if that's the moment when He said it. Surely there must have been the time prior to that when it was spoken, that He was made fully aware of His mission in life.

There was an Englishman who came to this country and he said there was one man he wanted to meet very much. He had heard a great deal about him. His name, A.F. Rigg. You never heard of him, of course you didn't. He was a physi-

cian. He lived in a small, out-of-the-way town. But he was more than a physician to the body....he was a physician to the soul. The patients would come to him, and then he would have the patients seated, and he'd draw up to the patient in a grandfatherly sort of way, and he'd ask what seemed to be the most foolish of all questions: "Why have you come to me?"

Then the patient would of course answer, the most reasonably, the most logical answer, "Why, I've come to see if you could help me. I want to get better, I want to get well."

And then this physician, to body and soul, would look the patient straight in the eye and ask the most unexpected question: "And just why do you want to get well?"

Pascal, the great French scientist, keen mind, searcher of souls, used to say that it troubled him greatly that most people concerned themselves with the incidental things of life, and seldom if ever came to grips with the real question: why does a man live, anyway? Why?

I've always been an admirer of the Scottish people. I think for one reason because I was first introduced to them through the catechism that they study, the catechism which is known as the Westminster Confession. Its first question is this: What is the chief end of man?

And the answer, as some of you know -- it's on your tongues already: The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

Do you know that part of the strength of Scottish character, if not all of the strength, lies in the fact that for hundreds of years, in every good and devout Scottish home, every youngster was taught the catechism and the first of all the questions, even if he never fully understood the answer -- at least he

was bred in this manner: that there was a reason for living, that there was a chief end to be served.

Jesus Christ came into the world.....why? What was His mission? What was His purpose?

Says He, "To this end was I born." His purpose for living was declared before He was born - - "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

God has a purpose for every single life, and the fact that it's spelled out so clearly in the life of Jesus Christ simply reminds us that it should be equally true for us.

But before we talk about ourselves, talk about Him.

His purpose: to save us from our sins.

His purpose: to guide us on the way of love and truth.

His purpose: to be God in our midst.

His purpose: to be God.

We never understand Him aright unless we see Him as Saviour. We never draw the full benefit of His life unless we see Him fulfilling that purpose. I hope you sense that to be true in what you receive in the Gospel that's proclaimed from this pulpit - - that He is never less than God, and God come to us as Saviour.

He isn't just a good example....He isn't just a gracious influence.....He isn't just another prophet.....He isn't just another teacher.....He isn't just an eternal Pilgrim.....He isn't just an elder brother....He isn't just a starry-eyed dreamer. He is God come to save us. To that end He gave His life. Every step that He took was oriented toward Calvary and beyond. Every word that He spoke was spoken out of love. Every deed that He performed was done in truth.

Now for the moment may I remind you that from a purely human point of view -- (it's phrased carefully) -- that from a purely human point of view, God used a Mary, and God used a Joseph, to see that Jesus was able to fulfill that purpose.....from a purely human point of view.

A child is born. But a child never grows up automatically. A child has to be loved, a child has to be cared for, a child has to be disciplined, a child must have set before it a good example. Is it too much to say that this fulfillment of purpose from a human point of view, as far as Jesus was concerned, could not have happened if there had not been a Mary and a Joseph who were as instruments in the hand of God, who assisted Him in fulfilling that purpose?

Now I pose for you the question: for what end have you been born?

Mahatma Gandhi used to tell the story, only for his closest friends, of course, about a man who came to him who was engaged in the liquor business. Gandhi, of course, as you know, was a tee-totaler. And he asked all of his faithful followers never to touch a drop. But it was a man who admired Gandhi greatly, but for certain reasons decided to take up the liquor business. And one time he came into Gandhi's presence and immediately tried to justify himself. It was his way of making a living....and he said to Gandhi, "A man must live, you know."

And Gandhi cut him to the quick simply by answering with the one word, "Why?"

So you and I will reach maturation, at least the semblance of maturation, when we can answer to ourselves: to what end was I born?

Jesus Christ always knew the answer to that question.

Now quite parenthetically.....

If you are a parent....if you are a grandparent....if you are a Sunday School teacher.....if you are anyone, the kind of person where God has put you in contact with a growing child, is it too much to suggest that you ask yourself the question: How, by the grace of God, can I help this child to fulfill his purpose in life? Maybe with the answer to that question you might get a different meaning for Christmas, because remember this, the Baby did grow up.....

....and the Baby did grow up with the help, not the hindrance, of people - - older people.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)